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4th UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries

Rich countries fail the world's poorest

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Editor's Note

IT was with a modicum of hope and guarded optimism that representatives of the least developed countries (LDCs) – along with their counterparts from the developed and developing countries, international agencies and civil society – convened in Istanbul on 9-13 May for the Fourth United Nations Conference on the LDCs (LDC-IV).

In attending this decennial event, these representatives from 48 of the poorest countries in the world had legitimate expectations that the rich countries would take some decisive steps in the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the LDCs for 2001-2010. The aim of the latter programme, which was adopted by LDC-III, is 'to make substantial progress toward halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty and suffering from hunger by 2015 and promote the sustainable development of the LDCs'. The Istanbul conference was convened with the aim of assessing the results of the Brussels Programme and adopting new measures and strategies for the sustainable development of the LDCs into 2020.

Apart from their Brussels commitments, there was also a moral imperative for the rich countries to respond generously to the plight of the over 800 million people living in the LDCs. For it is the financial and trade policies of these rich countries that in recent years have pushed millions of these people even deeper into poverty. Taking a longer-term view, the economic policies of the developed countries and the export-led development model they promoted among the LDCs surely contributed in a significant way to the fact that the number of LDCs has almost doubled from 25 to 48 in the last four decades.

To spur the developed countries to make the necessary commitments to realise the Brussels goal, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at the opening of the Istanbul conference made an impassioned plea for a 'comprehensive and ambitious Programme of Action for sustained economic growth' in the LDCs. In the event, the new Programme of Action that emerged from the conclusion of the conference on 13 May was anything but 'comprehensive and ambitious'.

The LDC leaders came to Istanbul expecting a significant increase in official development aid. To their disappointment, the Istanbul Programme of Action merely stated that those countries already providing more than 0.20% of their gross national product (GNP) as aid to LDCs will continue to do so; those which have met the 0.15% target will undertake to reach 0.20%; and others which have committed themselves to the 0.15% target will either achieve the target by 2015 or try their best to do so.

But more than aid, it was the outcome on trade that was to prove the most bitter pill to swallow. There had been expectation that the Istanbul conference would result in an advance over a 2005 World Trade Organisation (WTO) decision obliging rich countries to give duty-free status for at least 97% of LDC exports. The hope was that this duty-free status could be extended to all LDC products, i.e., 100%. Instead, the developed countries, in Scrooge-like fashion, offered the sop of 'timely implementation' of the WTO decision.

Clearly, it was a crushing disappointment as it was evident that the rich countries were not prepared to move beyond the status quo. Some UN officials tried to put a positive spin on the outcome, but civil society groups under the umbrella of the LDC Civil Society Forum were dismissive of the Istanbul Programme of Action for failing to live up to the mandate agreed ahead of the conference. Worse still, the rich countries had tried to present South-South cooperation as being substantial enough to absolve them of additional commitments to support the LDCs.

In addition to the failure to commit additional finances for the LDCs, significant civil society criticism is levelled against the rich countries over their ideological bias in their approach to 'enhancing productive capacity' in the LDCs. While the civil society groups fully endorse the need to boost 'productive capacity', they charge that the Istanbul Programme of Action 'relies heavily on economic liberalisation repackaged in new ways'. Specifically, 'market-led approaches have been replaced by private sector-led approaches'. While accepting that the private sector can play 'a useful role', they contend, on the basis of previous experiences of these countries, that the goal of sustainable development with equity cannot be realised by relying on the private sector and the market alone. Calling for a clear rejection of the 'Washington Consensus', they advocate instead 'participative national development strategies that focus on each country's vision and core strengths'.

However, while stressing the need for such 'people-centred approaches to development' as the real alternative, the civil society groups are also mindful of the need for 'an effective follow-up strategy' to LDC-IV to ensure results and delivery on the commitments by the developed countries. In short, disappointing as the Istanbul Programme of Action is, it is essential to hold the rich countries to account on the pledges they have made, weak as these are.

Our cover story for this issue focuses on the UN LDC-IV conference. While providing a broad analysis of its disappointing outcome, we specially highlight the criticism by the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) of the Istanbul Programme of Action. Taking up civil society's concern about the 'repackaging' of economic liberalisation in the Programme of Action, we also carry a report on a high-level thematic debate at the conference where the related policy of trade liberalisation came under fire. Finally, as part of the discussion of alternatives, we publish an African view on the need to revisit the concept of the developmental state.

– The Editors

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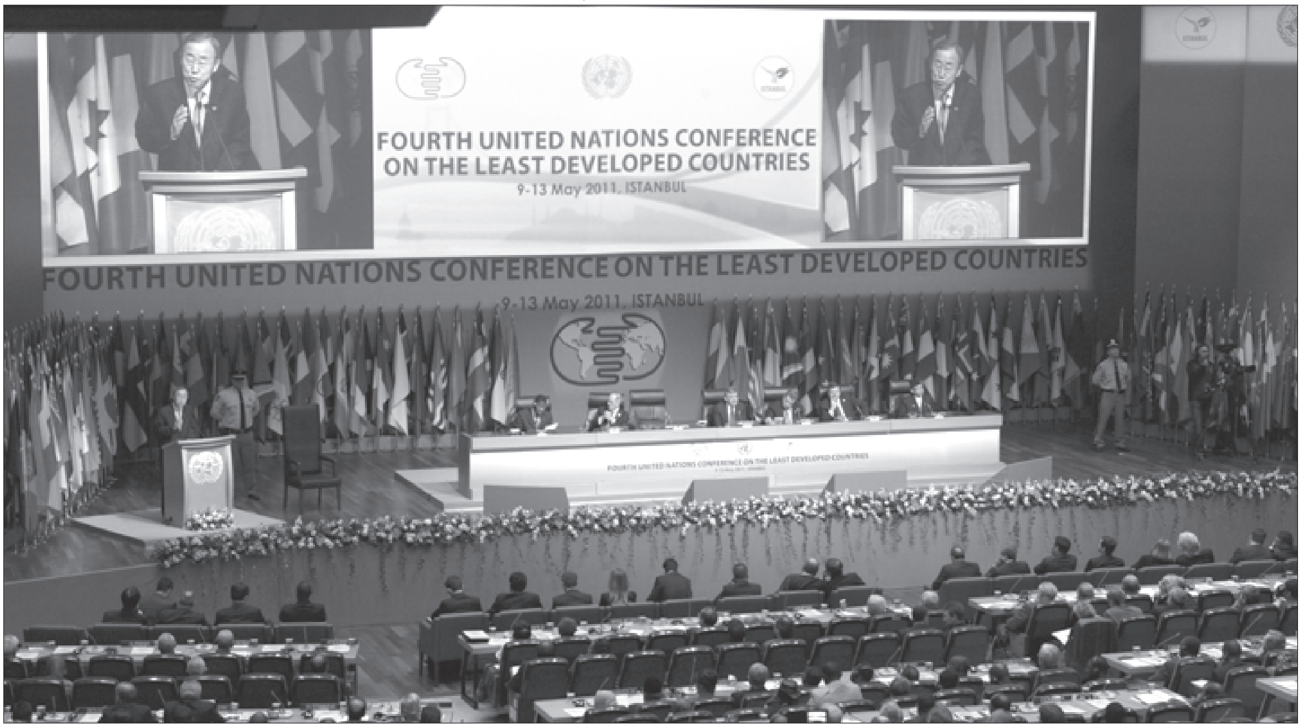

UN Photo/Evan Schneider

The Fourth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries ***(pic)*****, which was held in Istanbul on 9-13 May, produced disappointingly little in the way of commitments to support the world's poorest nations. 8**

THIRD WORLD RESURGENCE is published by the Third World Network, an international network of groups and individuals involved in efforts to bring about a greater articulation of the needs and rights of peoples in the Third World; a fair distribution of world resources; and forms of development which are ecologically sustainable and fulfil human needs.

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ECOLOGY

It's time to listen to nature

Why should we only respect the laws of human beings and not those of nature, asks Bolivia's UN representative *Pablo Solón*?

VICTOR Hugo, the author of *Les Misérables*, once wrote: 'How sad to think that nature speaks and mankind doesn't listen.'

We are here today to attempt to have a dialogue not just among states, but also with nature. Although we often forget it, human beings are a force in nature. In reality, we are all a product of the same Big Bang that created the universe, although some only see wood for the fire when they walk through the forest.

These three questions are the point of departure for our discussion today:

First, what is nature? Is it a thing, a source of resources, a system, a home, a community of living and interdependent beings?

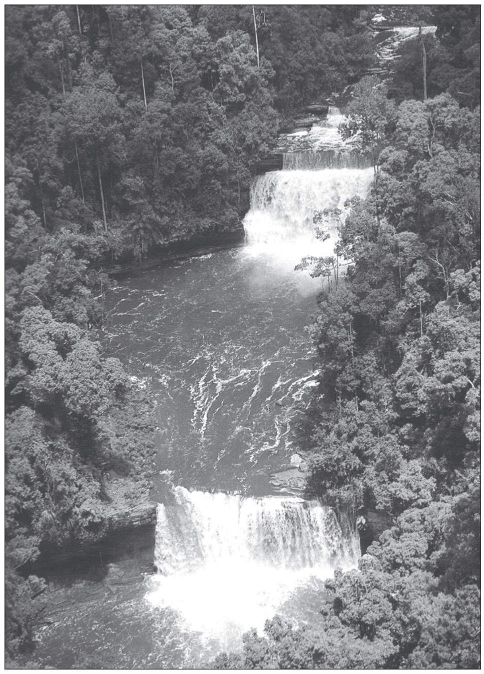
Second, are there rules in nature? Are there natural laws that govern its integrity, interrelationships, reproduction and transformation?

And third, are we as states and as a society recognising, respecting and making sure that the rules of nature prevail?

The philosopher Francis Bacon said that we cannot command nature except by obeying her. The time for superheroes and superpowers is coming to an end. Nature cannot be submitted to the will of the laboratory. Science and technology are capable of everything, including destroying the world itself.

It is time to stop and reaffirm the precautionary principle in the face of geo-engineering and all artificial manipulation of the climate. All new technologies should be evaluated to gauge their environmental, social and economic impacts. The answer for the future lies not in scientific inventions but in our capacity to listen to nature.

The green economy considers it necessary, in the struggle to preserve biodiversity, to put a price on the free services that plants, animals and ecosystems offer humanity: the purification of water, the pollination of plants by bees, the protection of coral reefs and climatic regulation.



'Nature cannot be submitted to the will of the laboratory.'

According to the green economy, we have to identify the specific functions of ecosystems and biodiversity that can be made subject to a monetary value, evaluate their current state, define the limits of those services, and set out in economic terms the cost of their conservation to develop a market for environmental services.

For the green economy, capitalism's mistake is not having fully incorporated nature as part of capital. That is why its central proposal is to create 'environmentally friendly' business and green jobs and in that way limit environmental degradation by bringing the laws of capitalism to bear on nature.

In other words, the transfusion of the rules of market will save nature.

This is not a hypothetical debate, since the third round of negotiations of the World Trade Organisation will be about the trade in services and environmental goods.

Humanity finds itself at a crossroads: Why should we only respect the laws of human beings and not those of nature? Why do we call the person who kills his neighbour a criminal, but not he who extinguishes a species or contaminates a river? Why do we judge the life of human beings with parameters different from those that guide the life of the system as a whole if all of us, absolutely all of us, rely on the life of the Earth System?

Is there no contradiction in recognising only the rights of the human part of this system while all the rest of the system is reduced to a source of resources and raw materials – in other words, a business opportunity?

To speak of equilibrium is to speak of rights for all parts of the system. It could be that these rights are not identical for all things, since not all things are equal. But to think that only humans should enjoy privileges while other living things are simply objects is the worst mistake humanity has ever made. Decades ago, to talk about slaves as having the same rights as everyone else seemed like the same heresy that it is now to talk about glaciers or rivers or trees as having rights.

Nature is ruthless when it goes ignored.

It is incredible that it is easier to imagine the destruction of nature than to dream about overthrowing capitalism.

Albert Einstein said, 'The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing.'

We have not come here to watch a funeral. ◆

The above is the text of a speech by Ambassador Pablo Solón, Permanent Representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia to the United Nations, delivered on the occasion of the UN General Assembly Interactive Dialogue on Harmony with Nature in New York on 20 April.

Controversial dams approved in Patagonia, Chile

Ignoring strong international and local opposition, the authorities have decided to proceed with a major dam project in southern Chile despite the huge environmental, social and economic costs involved.

A FIVE-dam hydroelectric scheme that locals fear will destroy the character of one of Chile's most important wild regions was approved on 9 May by the Aysén Environmental Review Commission with a vote of 11 in favour and one opposed. Critics say the approval process for the HidroAysén project has been marred by a flawed Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and serious conflicts of interest on the part of Commission members.

The project has been the target of a local and international campaign that for five years has been fighting to keep Patagonia's rivers free of dams. A recent poll found that over 61% of Chileans are against the project.

Patricio Rodrigo, Executive Secretary of the Council in Defence of Patagonia, says that Chileans will not give up. 'We are outraged that the regional environmental review commission has approved this destructive and illegal project against the will of the majority of Chileans. We are calling on President [Sebastian] Piñera to overturn this decision and protect Patagonia.'

On 6 May, conflict-of-interest charges were filed against members of the Environmental Review Commission, including regional Governor Pilar Cuevas and other representatives. On 9 May morning, the charges against the representatives were accepted, but an injunction on the day's vote was not granted. Several Commission members had already recused themselves from the vote due to conflicts of interest, including the regional housing representative, regional environmental representative, regional energy minister, and the mining representative.

A protester carrying a Chilean flag emblazoned with the words 'Patagonia Without Dams' during a demonstration against the HidroAysén project.

Countrywide protests on 9 May and on 26 April confirm that the campaign for a Patagonia Sin Represas (Patagonia Without Dams) is gaining momentum, despite a multimillion-dollar scare tactic campaign by HidroAysén this year.

Whether or not President Piñera overturns the HidroAysén dams approval, the fight to stop this project is far from over. The next phase is the Environmental Impact Assessment for the $3.8 billion, 2,300-km-long transmission lines needed to export the electricity from Patagonia to the Chilean capital Santiago. The EIA process for the lines will likely prove to be even more difficult, as they would affect thousands of Chileans and require the world's longest clearcut through virgin rainforest, protected areas, national parks, and a geologically risky region strewn with active volcanoes and afflicted by earthquakes.

'The HidroAysén dams are a risky investment for Chile and would threaten a region of global significance,' said Berklee Lowrey-Evans, Latin America Programme Associate at the non-governmental organisation International Rivers. 'Numerous studies have shown that Chile can sustainably and safely meet its energy needs through increased investments in non-conventional renewable energy and energy efficiency, with less environmental, social and economic costs than HidroAysén.'

The HidroAysén project would include five dams – three on the Pascua River and two on the Baker River – that would flood at least 5,600 hectares of globally rare forest ecosystems, river valleys and farmlands in the Aysén region of southern Chile, including a portion of the Laguna San Rafael National Park. With the dams' price tag rising – they are now expected to cost approximately $3.2 billion – the total cost, including transmission lines, is estimated to be $7 billion. The project is being developed by Enel of Italy and Colbún of Chile. Financing is expected to come mainly from private investment banks in Chile, the US and Europe. – *International Rivers* ◆

Climate change: Neck deep in the Big Muddy

Even as the US continues to be ravaged by the effects of climate change, it is still in a state of denial, says *Glenn Scherer*.

THE Mississippi River has risen to levels never seen in US history – lapping levee tops and threatening cities and hamlets from Memphis to the Gulf. Floodwaters cover an area bigger than Connecticut, the result of a record 90 inches of precipitation in the Midwest.

Record flooding in the Mississippi River region points to the impact of climate change in the US.

Some would point an accusatory finger at human-caused global warming. But as any climatologist will tell you, no single weather event is attributable to global warming.

Meanwhile, Texas is in flames. It has endured the seven driest months on record, with drought parching 98% of the Lone Star state. No one has ever seen the like of it, with 2.2 million acres already scorched black by wildfires.

Of course, as any Obama administration official will gladly testify, no one weather event can be traced back to climate change.

Out West, record snowpack, a staggering 200% above normal, has brought severe flood risks to Utah, Wyoming, and Montana. While eastern Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona are enduring drought and gearing up for an equally severe fire season.

Of course, as any freshman Tea Party Congressman will insist, no one weather event can ever be said to be created by human-caused climate change.

And who can forget April, when 312 tornadoes smashed the Southeast, with a record-setting 228 twisters spawned in a single day? Some of those killer funnel clouds were a mile wide and stayed on the ground across several states.

Of course, as any Exxon or Koch brothers-funded climate change skeptic will scold you, no one weather event can ever be seen to be the result of human-caused climate change.

Go out in your backyard, stick a thumb up in the air or look at what's blooming today, and you'll likely know. The times are a-changin' – fast. Your community and mine are hotter, drier or wetter, with nastier storms than you or your grandparents ever saw.

But… as any Fox News anchor will assert, no single weather event can ever be seen as being the product of human-caused climate change.

But, how about thousands of weather events? Shattered heat records. Drought records. Deluge records. Winters grown milder and shorter. Summers grown longer and brutally hot. Icecaps melting, ice shelves collapsing, glaciers in galloping retreat. It's exactly what climate modellers began forecasting two decades ago.

Except, the scientists told us then these sorts of catastrophes wouldn't hammer us until 2050 or later. Hell, Greenland wasn't supposed to melt significantly until *after* 2100, but it is melting significantly *now*. Global coral reefs are dying *now*, global food harvests are in decline *now*, and food prices are breaking records *now* due to changing climate.

Still, we're a nation with its head in the sand. Worse, like a drug addict whose connection just got popped, we're sniffing out fossil fuel under every rock; raping the Canadian tar sands; readying drilling platforms in Arctic seas and Gulf deepwater; and turning vast swathes of rural America into a pincushion of drilling rigs fracked for natural gas.

This spring, President Obama even called for an enormous expansion of the dirtiest, most polluting industry of all. Under his plan, new coal mines will increase US climate change emissions by over 50% beyond what we're producing currently.

Damn the risks. We need our energy fix!

Meantime, the Mississippi rolls on. 'We've never seen anything like this. I was scared not knowing what's going to happen or where we can go from here,' said flood victim Tamara Jenkins of Frayser, Tennessee, talking to CNN.

Well, Ms. Jenkins, you may be neck deep in the Big Muddy and not know what's going to happen next. But the fossil fuel industry, our president and Congress do. They have complete confidence in our business-as-usual energy policy, and say we should push on.

After all, Ms. Jenkins, every damn fool knows that no single flood of biblical proportions can be attributed to human-caused climate change. Just ask Noah. ◆

Glenn Scherer is senior editor of Blue Ridge Press in the US. This article is reproduced from CommonDreams.org.

Egypt should not take a new IMF loan

There is no doubt Egypt needs external financing, but it should resist an IMF loan. The IMF's rhetoric may have changed slightly after the global financial crisis, but there is no evidence that it has abandoned its core fundamental tenets.

Rick Rowden

Unemployed archaeology graduates demonstrating at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo to demand jobs. IMF policy prescriptions could undermine employment growth in Egypt.

EGYPT should do as many Latin American and East Asian emerging market economies have done in recent years and purposefully avoid contracting another harmful loan programme from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

As several of these countries learned the hard way over many years, the IMF is not a friendly development institution, nor an objective fireman ready to help put out financial fires. Instead, it acts on behalf of its executive board whose members are directed by the US Treasury and the finance ministries of other leading creditor economies, who in turn are each under immense lobbying pressure by their respective finance industry associations. The IMF's job is to ensure borrowing countries stay creditworthy and repay their foreign creditors on time.

In the last 30 years, a massive global shift of financial resources has occurred from the real sector of national economies (where real jobs and goods and services are created) to the financial sector (or casino sector) under the rubric of 'financial liberalisation'. The IMF's priorities are to enforce reforms in borrowing countries that prioritise the short-term needs of creditors, while subordinating the needs of those living in the real economy. Egyptians who would instead prefer to prioritise job creation should make no mistake about this core function of the institution.

To be sure, the IMF has changed its rhetoric in the wake of the global financial crisis, and, in Egypt's case, in the wake of the revolutionary forces sweeping the Arab world. For example, at a conference examining the pitfalls of IMF orthodoxy in the aftermath of the global economic crisis, held at its headquarters in early March, Olivier Blanchard, economic counsellor and director of the Research Department at the IMF, acknowledged the need for central banks to be allowed a more flexible range of monetary policy options and the need for new regulatory policies to ensure 'macro-prudential' financial regulations for increased global financial stability. And on 15 April, Egyptian Facebook activist Wael Ghonim got a high-profile concession out of IMF Managing Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn at the IMF/World Bank meetings in Washington. Strauss-Kahn responded to claims of prior IMF misdeeds in Egypt by saying that the IMF indeed must do a better job of linking its abstract economic and financial indicators with 'what is really important to the people in the street' and to address the problems of high unemployment and growing income inequality.

Conservative logic

Yet despite such high-profile talk of changes, Egyptians should be aware that there is no evidence that the IMF has at all shifted from its core fundamental tenets guiding its economic philosophy, its macroeconomic framework and its financial programming model. This approach comes from a very conservative logic brought into ascendancy by US President Ronald Reagan and UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher over 30 years ago, which is actually just a value judgment that believes that if there is a trade-off it is better to have lower GDP, lower employment, lower tax revenues and lower spending than to have even moderate inflation or fiscal deficits.

When this logic was introduced it had been widely understood as one very conservative option among an array of other viable policy options. But it has since come to be understood as the one and only 'prudent' and 'sound' option as taught by the best economics departments at the best universities for the last two or three generations, including to Gamal Mubarak's 'technocrats'. However, as Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz recently summarised at the IMF conference in March, 'The idea that low and stable inflation would lead to a stable real economy and to fast economic growth was never supported by economic theory or evidence and yet became a central tenet of central bank policy.'

Today Egypt should reject this orthodoxy and instead maintain its freedom to consider a wider range of alternative fiscal, monetary, financial and trade policies, many of which could proactively generate higher GDP growth, more employment, greater tax revenues, and increased public investment as a percentage of GDP – all of which will be essential for creating the millions of jobs needed and closing the income gap over the longer term.

'Stabilisation-focused' policy

Although Gamal Mubarak's team of 'technocrats' put together in 2005 to step up reforms then claimed that the IMF macroeconomic policy would increase growth and create employment in Egypt, in fact the priorities of the programme were not at all focused on economic growth or employment generation. Instead, the IMF programme had the Egyptian Central Bank preparing to adopt a rigid 'inflation targeting' policy designed to keep inflation in the low single digits as the exclusive target of monetary policy, and to subordinate fiscal policy goals to this objective.

Under this monetary policy, other important goals – such as financial stability, more rapid economic growth and employment creation – have been seen as inappropriate direct targets of central bank policy. Rather, the orthodox approach views stability, growth and employment as the hoped-for – even presumed – by-products of an inflation-focused approach to monetary policy. Accordingly, the goal of Egypt's monetary policy under an IMF programme is likely to be only for 'stabilisation', rather than for achieving higher growth, employment or public investment for development. The approach presumes that once 'stabilisation' is achieved, higher economic growth, employment, and poverty reduction will eventually follow spontaneously.

The IMF's spring meetings in Washington in April. The priorities of the IMF are to enforce reforms in borrowing countries that prioritise the short-term needs of creditors.

Despite such claims by the IMF and its advocates over the last 30 years, the track record has shown that higher growth and employment are not automatic by-products of the IMF's 'stabilisation-focused' central bank policy. Instead, although the IMF has successfully driven down inflation to low levels and 'stabilised' many countries, growth rates and employment rates have been markedly lower in these last 30 years than they had been under different approaches in the previous 30-year period, and as income inequality has worsened.

Such was also the conclusion of the high-level 2008 Spence Commission on Growth and Development when it explained: 'Very high inflation is clearly damaging to investment and growth. Bringing inflation down is also very costly in terms of lost output and employment. But how high is very high? Some countries have grown for long periods with persistent inflation of 15-30%.' Commission member Montek Singh Ahluwalia added: 'The international financial institutions, the IMF in particular, have tended to see public investment as a short-term stabilisation issue, and failed to grasp its long-term growth consequences. If low-income countries are stuck in a low-level equilibrium, then putting constraints on their infrastructure spending may ensure they never take off.'

As the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs recently said of the IMF approach, 'Focusing on inflation and fiscal deficits alone reflects too narrow a view of stabilisation. Therefore, stabilisation needs to be defined more broadly to include stability of the real economy, with smoothened business cycles and reduced fluctuations of output, investment, employment and incomes. Achieving such stability of the real economy may require larger fiscal deficits and higher rates of inflation than prescribed by the conventional macroeconomic policy mix, especially in the face of economic shocks or natural calamities.' However, despite such concerns, IMF policy is not likely to allow anything of the kind for Egypt if it adopts a new IMF programme.

A factory worker in Mahalla, Egypt. Egypt should pursue a wider array of industrial policies to build the technological skills and capacities of its workforce and domestic companies.

Even though the current level of inflation in Egypt is largely exogenous, coming from the outside due to increased fuel and food prices on global markets, the IMF's programme for Egypt as approved from just a year ago had planned for Egypt to respond to this situation by raising interest rates as the main way of getting inflation down. But today Egypt should move beyond the IMF's narrow 'inflation targeting approach' to monetary policy and increase the numbers of available policy targets to include higher employment levels and higher growth rates while also keeping an eye on inflation. If the US Federal Reserve can be instructed by the Humphrey-Hawkins law to maintain both low inflation and high levels of employment as goals, then certainly Egypt should also be able to adopt similar changes to the Egyptian Central Bank's monetary policy goals and targets.

Capital controls

To its credit, the IMF has recently made one notable policy change on its longstanding opposition to any kinds of capital controls, in this case finally issuing an edict that says now certain types of capital controls to prevent the damage caused by sudden large inflows of foreign capital may be temporarily acceptable, under certain conditions, and as a last resort. In other words, after 30 years the IMF is begrudgingly conceding there is a role for the state in regulating finance after all. Yet the political and chronological reality is that nearly a dozen or so emerging market economies had already gone ahead and implemented a range of such capital controls over the last two years in efforts to stem such large inflows from global investors of the industrialised countries. What is equally noteworthy is that they did so without having waited for the IMF to say it was OK. Therefore, while the belated IMF policy modification is welcomed, it was behind the curve on actual practice among those countries not dependent on its loan programmes and that were thus free to experiment with greater policy latitude.

Egypt should be similarly free to consider all of its options regarding monetary and fiscal policies and priorities, and not be locked into the IMF's preferred ideological straightjacket. Egypt should have the policy space to prioritise scaling up public investment and increasing employment to whatever degree it deems necessary by a new and more representative government, and not be limited by policies that reflect the priorities of external creditors.

Egypt should be able to make use of capital controls as a permanent tool in its policy toolbox, not merely as a temporary last resort. It should work with others to renegotiate the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and Non-Agricultural Market Access (NAMA) arrangements at the World Trade Organisation, as well as the many free trade agreements (FTAs) and bilateral investment treaties (BITs) that all call for sped-up, premature trade and investment liberalisation. Under many such agreements, rules stipulate that governments may not be able to adequately reregulate their financial sectors to ensure stability, may not be able to implement capital controls, or use adequate levels of trade protection for their nascent manufacturing industries, thus blocking their capacity for economic development.

Egypt should pursue a wider array of essential industrial policies as part of a long-term development strategy to build the technological skills and capacities of its workforce and domestic companies. It should adopt institutions and policies to support the emergence of new industries with publicly-financed research and development (R&D), in acquiring new technologies, with subsidies, temporary trade protection, subsidised credit and other mechanisms that had long been part of the mainstream development economics toolkit when the rich countries were industrialising. It should also design its trade and foreign direct investment policies in ways that will ensure its workforce and domestic companies acquire the skills, technology and financing they need to advance onto the next rung of the development ladder in terms of technological sophistication and international competitiveness.

Meaningfully engaging in such a developmental approach would be forbidden under an IMF programme. Instead, if Egypt adopts a new IMF programme, it could well be in store for yet even more years of job-destroying privatisation, premature trade liberalisation and restrictive fiscal and monetary policies.

There is no doubt that Egypt needs emergency external financing to see it through the temporary economic side-effects of the recent political transformation, but such financing does not need to come from the IMF. Instead, Egypt should look to its regional neighbours and other emerging markets – such as Brazil, China and East Asia – to bridge together the financing it needs and thereby remain free to pursue serious development strategies. ◆

Rick Rowden is the author of The Deadly Ideas of Neoliberalism: How the IMF Has Undermined Public Health and the Fight Against AIDS *(Zed Books, 2009). He has assisted on the documentary* We Are Egypt*, directed by Lillie Paquette, about the history of political change underway in Egypt. This article is reproduced from the Ahram Online website (english.ahram.org.eg).*

Helping the world's poorest countries

Held in Istanbul, Turkey on 9-13 May, a United Nations summit to assist the least developed countries (LDCs) ended with new pledges, but the results were really disappointing.

Martin Khor

THE plight of the world's poorest countries was the focus of a 9-13 May United Nations summit in Istanbul, attended by almost 50 heads of government and hundreds of ministers.

There are 48 least developed countries in the world, including 33 in Africa and 14 in the Asia-Pacific region. Their combined population is over 800 million. They are among the poorest billion of the world's people.

In 1971 there were only 25 LDCs, thus their number has almost doubled. And only three LDCs have 'graduated' to the status of a 'developing country'.

The continuing poverty, poor health conditions and high unemployment in the LDCs are thus a great source of concern.

In the past decade, the LDCs enjoyed quite good economic growth rates. But much of this achievement was due to the high prices of the commodities the LDCs export, rather than any breakthrough in industrial and agricultural development.

The commodity boom was reversed in 2008-9 due to the global recession, and the LDC economies dipped. Commodity prices have picked up again in the past year, but this trend could again be reversed if the world economy slows down again, which is likely.

Indeed the LDCs are even more vulnerable than before to the fluctuations of the world economy, and the prospects for both (the global economy and the LDCs) are anything but bright.

The Fourth UN Conference on the LDCs (dubbed LDC-IV) was thus an important opportunity to review what has happened to the poor countries since the last conference a decade ago, and to obtain pledges from the developed countries to renew their support for the LDCs.

The Fourth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries represented a missed opportunity to obtain pledges from the developed countries to renew and raise their support for the LDCs.

Unfortunately, the rich countries were in no mood to renew and raise their commitments.

Many European economies are in a debt crisis; the US politicians are obsessed with cutting their government spending and Japan is in emergency mode following the earthquake and tsunami.

Thus, the rich countries were unwilling or unable (or both) to make meaningful pledges on aid.

Weak outcome

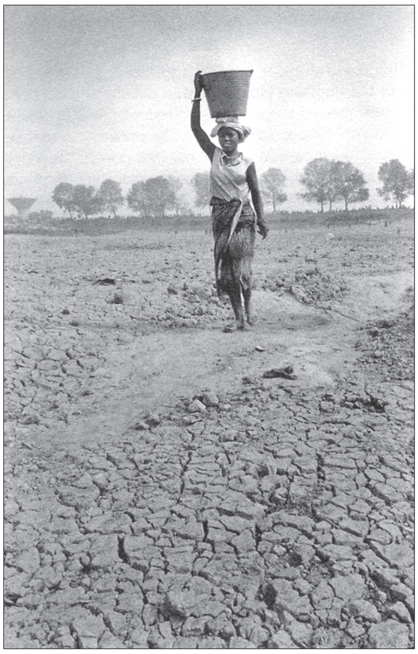
The Istanbul Programme of Action, adopted by the Conference on 13 May, merely stated that those countries already providing more than 0.20% of their gross national product (GNP) as aid to LDCs will continue to do so; those which have met the 0.15% target will undertake to reach 0.20%; and others which have committed themselves to the 0.15% target will either achieve the target by 2015 or try their best to do so.

This weak statement with its loopholes was rebuked by the civil society groups attending the Conference.

'The plan of action has no teeth and appears to have left the people in LDCs in a worse position than before. We are appalled and disillusioned,' said Arjun Karki, the leader of the civil society forum at LDC-IV.

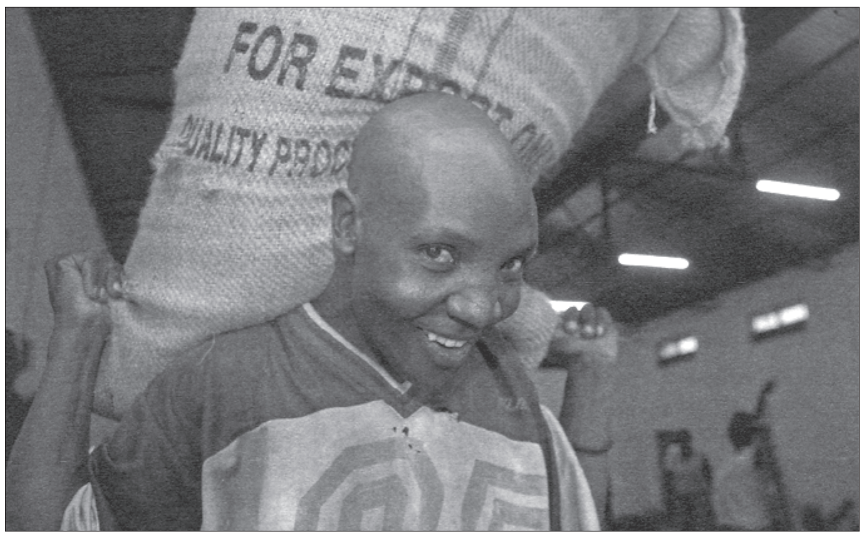
'The failure of LDC-IV should mostly be blamed on the developed world for failing to commit additional finances for the LDCs,' said Thida Khus, director of Silaka, a Cambodian non-governmental organisation (NGO).

Indeed, the Programme of Action seems to contain more commitments by LDCs to take their own actions



The Istanbul conference produced no new commitment to assist the LDCs with funds or technology to meet the challenges of climate change.

The continuing poverty, poor health conditions and high unemployment in the LDCs are a great source of concern.



Shouldering a sack of 'export quality' coffee in Uganda. LDCs' dependence on exports of commodities leaves them vulnerable to fluctuations in commodity prices.

than commitments by rich countries to assist them, which is a reversal from previous LDC conferences.

For example, climate change is a major issue for LDCs which face increased flooding, lower agricultural productivity and other problems.

There is no new pledge in the Programme of Action to assist the LDCs with either funds or technology, beyond the general principles already made elsewhere.

Yet the LDCs have pledged to mainstream national climate change adaptation and mitigation actions, and integrate these into national development plans. This pledge goes beyond what the LDCs have been obliged to do at the UN climate convention.

On trade, the most hotly contested issue was the provision of duty-free, quota-free market access for products of the LDCs.

There was an effort by developing countries in general to make an advance over the World Trade Organisation (WTO)'s Hong Kong decision of 2005 (which mandates that rich countries give duty-free status for at least 97% of LDC products) and to obtain this commitment for 100% of products.

Disappointingly, the eventual outcome was only to 'realise timely implementation' of the Hong Kong decision. However, an advance is that the adoption of this at the LDC Conference could pave the way for an 'early harvest' of the WTO's stalled Doha Round trade talks, namely, that this can be implemented even before the overall Doha talks are completed.

Whatever small gains the LDCs may get out of this Conference may also be wiped out if they sign on to free trade agreements they are negotiating with the European Union.

In these Economic Partnership Agreements, the African and Pacific countries (many of which are LDCs) are being asked to cut their tariffs to zero for 80% of their imports. They also have to open up their services, investments and government procurement business.

This may overwhelm the small farms and firms of the LDCs, and make it more difficult for these countries to institute development policies, a fear that was expressed by several speakers at a dialogue session on trade issues during the Conference.

The eventual success of this Conference now depends on whether a strong follow-up mechanism is set up to monitor and implement the pledges that were made in Istanbul in the Programme of Action. ◆

Martin Khor is Executive Director of the South Centre, an intergovernmental policy think-tank of developing countries, and former Director of the Third World Network.

LDC Conference adopts Istanbul Declaration, no new aid pledged

The Istanbul conference adopted a declaration which reaffirmed solidarity with the poorest nations, but yielded no fresh development aid commitments for the LDCs.

Sanya Smith

THE Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC-IV) ended on 13 May with the adoption of a political document, the Istanbul Declaration, as well as the Istanbul Programme of Action.

These outcomes were achieved after months of intense and often contentious negotiations that took place at the United Nations in New York and continued to the last day and hours in Istanbul.

The most disappointing aspect of the outcomes is that no additional aid was pledged for the LDCs. This fact was recognised and remarked upon by the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, who was also the Chair of the Conference, in his concluding speech.

Turkish Foreign Minister and LDC-IV Chair Ahmet Davutoglu: '[D]eveloped countries abstained from additional financial commitments in the Conference.'

The outcome of the Conference was heavily criticised by civil society organisations present at LDC-IV in Istanbul for falling far short in assisting the LDCs. In its final statement, the Civil Society Forum said the Conference failed to meet its expectations as well as the UN General Assembly mandate for LDC-IV. (See the full text of the civil society statement on pp. 19-22.)

'Civil society is frustrated that, having caused massive costs in the LDCs through financial and food speculation, unjust trade rules, illegitimate loans with onerous conditionality, and ecological damage, including climate change, the developed countries have not even committed to provide more aid to LDCs,' said the statement.

'Even worse, many donors are either reducing their aid or diverting it to pay for climate change damage, despite their commitments in UNFCCC [UN Framework Convention on Climate Change] negotiations to provide new and additional funding for climate finance. Current levels of aid are dwarfed by the mounting costs of the damage done to LDC economies and their people.'

Hard negotiations

In the closing plenary session after the adoption of the Istanbul Declaration and Programme of Action, Argentina, on behalf of the developing-country Group of 77 (G77) and China, made a closing speech. It remarked that it had been a very hard process of negotiations at times and the agreement does not entirely reflect the aspirations that the G77 and China and LDCs had had when they began the negotiations.

'We are nevertheless pleased that we maintained various [parts] of the commitments that are still present in the Istanbul Programme of Action,' said Argentina. It added that in implementing the Programme of Action, the role of developed countries is crucial while the UN system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, are also called upon to support the LDCs.

It stressed that at the same time, the developing countries feel proud to be able to support the LDCs through South-South cooperation, in the Programme of Action. 'In this way, we maintain the specific identity of cooperation amongst developing countries based on solidarity and respect for national development priorities in every country. So we look forward to South-South cooperation to give added value to the Programme of Action.'

In particular, said Argentina, 'we would like to note that partnership for development is not a matter of charity, we are investing to improve the quality of life for human beings and future generations. We are talking about remedying the tremendous injustice that has affected the world for many centuries.'

The representative from the European Union (EU) expressed their satisfaction with the proceedings of the conference and the ambitious and realistic outcome in the Istanbul Programme of Action and Declaration. The EU pointed out that it is the largest donor to LDCs and gives full market access for all products from LDCs and encourages other countries to do likewise.

In the only other speech by a delegation upon adoption of the Declaration and Programme of Action, Australia, on behalf of Canada, New Zealand and Australia, said they sought to be constructive partners and will be serious about implementing it.

Chair's statement

Davutoglu, the Turkish Foreign Minister and Conference Chair, remarked that 'developed countries abstained from additional financial commitments in the Conference.'

In his closing statement, the Minister quoted a famous hadith (commentaries based on the statements and actions of the Prophet Muhammad, considered by Muslims as essential supplements to and clarifications of the Koran): 'He who sleeps on a full stomach whilst his neighbour goes hungry is not one of us.'

He then announced that Turkey will make available a total of $200 million annually to LDCs, starting in 2012, for technical cooperation projects and programmes as well as scholarships.

According to the Minister, Turkey's current investments in LDCs are almost $2 billion and it aims to increase this level of direct investment in LDCs, particularly from its private sector, to a total of $5 billion by 2015 and $10 billion by 2020. In addition to an International Science, Technology and Innovation Centre, Turkey is also prepared to host an International Agriculture Centre dedicated to LDCs.

The Minister also declared that Turkey will allocate $5 million for the monitoring of the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action and that it was ready to host a Mid-Term Review Conference of the Programme of Action in 2015.

He concluded by reminding the participants that Turkish President Abdullah Gul had stated in his opening remarks that a world that tolerates extreme inequalities is not a world built upon shared values and objectives. 'Thus, we need to work together to build a more dignified future for the people of the LDCs ... We believe a brighter future is possible. And Turkey will do everything in its power to make it [a] reality. Istanbul will then be remembered as the place where the misfortune of 900 million people has taken a positive turn.'

Istanbul Declaration

The final version of the Istanbul Declaration had not been issued by the time of the final plenary, but an advance draft was available. The Declaration begins by reaffirming that solidarity and partnership with the poorest, weakest and most vulnerable countries and their people is not only a moral and ethical imperative, but also an economic and political one which corresponds to long-term interests of the international community and serves the cause of peace, security and prosperity for all.

It recognises that not all the objectives and goals set out in the last Programme of Action (adopted by the Third UN LDC Conference held in Brussels in 2001) have been fully achieved and commits to implementing the Istanbul Programme of Action.

The Declaration expresses deep concern that the ongoing impacts of the economic and financial crisis as well as the volatile energy and food prices, problems of food security and increasing challenges due to climate change, natural disasters and loss of biodiversity are threatening the development gains that LDCs have made so far.

The Istanbul Declaration also recognises that LDCs deserve support in line with their development strategies to address their development needs in a coherent manner in trade, investment, finance, including official development assistance (ODA) and technology. In addition, it recognises the need for enhancing the voice and participation of LDCs in relevant multilateral institutions and international fora.

The Istanbul Declaration underscores that ownership, leadership and primary responsibility for development in LDCs rest with the LDCs themselves. After recognising LDCs' development efforts thus far, the Declaration underlines the importance of gender equality and the empowerment of women to development and eradication of poverty in LDCs.

On ODA, the donor countries undertake to fulfil all the ODA commitments to LDCs and consider further enhancing the resources for LDCs in the Declaration.

'[W]e need to work together to build a more dignified future for the people of the LDCs.'

Productive capacity is prioritised in the next decade in the Declaration, which in this regard: underscores the importance of reliable and affordable infrastructure services; recognises the importance of mobilisation of financial resources including ODA and foreign direct investment; underscores how essential sustainable agriculture focusing on small-scale farmers is to achieving food security; acknowledges the potential of regional economic integration and undertakes to promote access of LDCs to knowledge, information, technology and knowhow and aims to establish a Technology Bank.

On trade, the Declaration commits to the timely implementation of duty-free and quota-free market access, on a lasting basis, for all LDCs, consistent with the Hong Kong Ministerial Declaration adopted by the World Trade Organisation in 2005. (The Hong Kong Ministerial Declaration agrees that developed-country WTO Members shall, and developing-country Members declaring themselves in a position to do so should, provide duty-free and quota-free market access on a lasting basis, for all products originating from all LDCs by 2008 or no later than the start of the implementation period. It allows Members facing difficulties at this time to provide 100% market access to provide duty-free and quota-free market access for at least 97% of products originating from LDCs by 2008 or no later than the start of the implementation period.)

The Istanbul Declaration also commits to ensuring that preferential rules of origin applied to products from LDCs are simple, transparent and predictable and contribute to facilitating market access.

New innovative financing mechanisms are voluntary and should not be a substitute for traditional sources of finance and should be disbursed in accordance with LDCs' priorities and not unduly burden them, according to the Declaration.

On climate change, the Declaration shares the aim of strengthening LDC capacity to adapt to and mitigate climate change, bearing in mind the provisions of the UNFCCC. It notes that mobilisation and provision of additional, adequate and predictable financial resources are necessary to address LDCs' adaptation and mitigation needs. It welcomes the decision to establish the Green Climate Fund and underscores the need for the access of the LDCs to appropriate, affordable and clean technologies that foster their sustained economic growth and sustainable development.

The 48 LDCs have a combined population of 880 million and only three countries have graduated from being LDCs. The Declaration commits to assisting LDCs to enable half of them to meet the criteria for graduation from LDC status. It also promises to work on developing and implementing smooth transition strategies for graduating and graduated LDCs.

The Declaration acknowledges the role of parliaments and the private sector and calls on civil society to enhance their roles in the development efforts of LDCs and takes note of the civil society declaration of the Conference. ◆

Sanya Smith is a researcher with the Third World Network. The above is extracted from an article which first appeared in the South-North Development Monitor *(*SUNS*, No. 7151, 17 May 2011) published by TWN.*

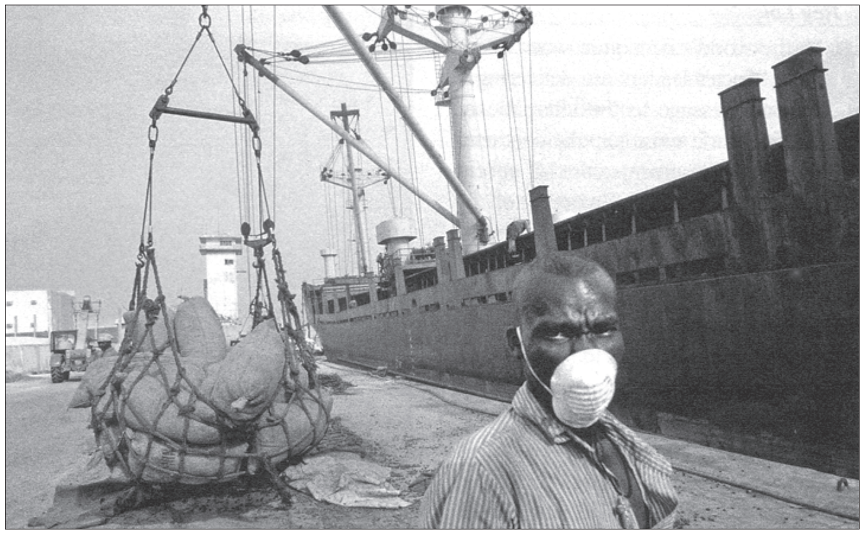
Trade liberalisation criticised in LDC Conference panel

Enabling the LDCs to harness the development potential of trade was the subject of a high-level session at the Istanbul conference. *Sanya Smith* reports on the discussions which took place.

EXCESSIVE trade liberalisation was criticised as being damaging to the economies of the least developed countries (LDCs) by participants at an official high-level thematic debate on trade at the United Nations LDC-IV Conference.

President Rupiah Bwezani Banda of the Republic of Zambia, who gave a keynote speech, also criticised the lack of a positive response from the European Union to African demands in the Economic Partnership Agreement negotiations.

He and other panellists called for an early harvest for LDC issues in the stalled Doha Round talks at the World Trade Organisation (WTO).



Cargo being loaded onto a ship in Benin. There is a need to remove barriers that still impede LDCs from participating in world trade.

WTO Director-General Pascal Lamy called for political will, but surprisingly stopped short of asking delegates to take measures to conclude the Doha Round.

The high-level interactive thematic debate on harnessing trade for the LDCs' development and transformation was held on 10 May.

It was co-chaired by the Prime Minister of Lesotho, Pakalitha Mosisili, and Peter Lilley, a Conservative British Member of Parliament who was Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and is currently co-chair of Trade Out of Poverty (a campaign set up by an all-party group of UK parliamentarians).

The keynote speakers were the Zambian President and Thongloun Sisoulith (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Lao People's Democratic Republic). Panellists included the WTO's Lamy, Martin Khor (Executive Director, South Centre), Martin Tofinga (President and Executive Director, Kiribati Chamber of Commerce and Industry) and Camille Chalmers (Leader, Haitian Platform for an Alternative Development).

Most vulnerable economies

Lesotho's Prime Minister Mosisili began by emphasising that LDCs are the most vulnerable economies in the multilateral trading system and that given the many challenges they face, they lack a competitive edge in world markets. He highlighted the need to harness trade for their development and that to do this, efforts should be made to harness its potential for LDCs. He pointed out that most LDCs export raw materials and that they remain marginalised in global trade due to supply-side constraints.

His priorities for the discussion included addressing supply-side constraints so that LDCs can diversify and shift to higher-value-added production.

He invited LDCs and multilateral institutions such as the WTO to consider the following questions: what LDC-related concerns have been addressed/are being addressed at the multilateral level; what initiatives are in place to address LDC supply-side constraints at the multilateral level; and the role that mechanisms such as unilateral preferences, regional trade agreements and South-South cooperation can play in expanding LDC trade and strengthening their capacity to trade.

Peter Lilley stated that it was hugely important to remove barriers that still impede LDCs from participating in world trade. He noted that high tariffs remain on the products that LDCs are best equipped to produce. He gave the example of the United States imposing higher tariffs on imports from Cambodia and Bangladesh than on those from the UK and France. Lilley pointed out that the US gets six times as much money from


A textile factory in Lesotho. LDCs face the basic problem of inadequate supply capacity which hinders them from taking advantage of any market opening.

tariffs on imports from Cambodia and Bangladesh as it gives to those countries in aid. So, he said, there was a need to get rid of those tariffs and sign up to the Doha commitment to do so as soon as possible.

Lilley went on to comment on the way in which rules of origin can be a barrier to trade. He observed that the US has more generous rules of origin than the EU. This meant that the simpler rules of origin in the US unilateral preferences through its African Growth and Opportunity Act had boosted trade more than the EU's Everything But Arms preference programme.

He explained that subsidies damage exports from LDCs such as cotton and other agricultural products and that they were unnecessary for developed countries. He highlighted the importance of giving countries the capacity to trade, such as infrastructure including roads, ports and railways and the ability to ensure quality etc.

However, he noted that the proportion of aid devoted to boosting economic capacity and infrastructure in developing countries has fallen by two-thirds.

Challenges and constraints

In his keynote address, Zambian President Banda noted that many LDCs still face challenges that hinder the use of preferential market access. He stated that major gaps still remain with respect to adequacy, appropriateness and timeliness of this preferential market access and that notable challenges with this preferential market access have been stringent rules of origin and burdensome standards requirements.

The President highlighted the supply-side constraints that LDCs continue to face that impede their efforts to integrate into global trade and concluded, 'It is therefore imperative that these challenges are addressed in a coherent and practical manner to enhance the role of trade in development and poverty reduction.'

He said that development partners needed to go beyond preferential market access and invest in making LDCs equally competitive.

He said that countries like Zambia look forward to an early harvest in the Doha Development Agenda negotiations and that the international community should ensure that the Agenda delivers a package on issues of concern to LDCs which are fully incorporated in the outcomes.

On the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations with the EU, he noted that they had reached a critical stage, yet the concerns of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries have not been fully addressed.

He noted ways (including aid for trade) in which LDCs' supply-side constraints could be addressed so they are not condemned to being perpetual suppliers of raw materials.

The President also said that issues of technology transfer should be fully incorporated to help LDCs respond to the challenges of climate change, and finished by saying that he expected 'that we shall leave Istanbul with a programme that fully addresses the issues that have and continue to impede the structural transformation of LDCs.'

In the second keynote speech, the Lao Deputy Prime Minister Sisoulith pointed out that 'there is still a lot for us to do to ensure that trade can really help LDCs.'

He added that the position of LDCs in the world trade system remains relatively the same as 10 years ago, and the problems such as supply-side constraints, duty-free, quota-free (market access) and other trade-related issues 'are the ones that we had tried to address a decade ago.'

He was clear that 'we need to ensure that what we do and decide today can really make a difference when we meet again in 10 years from now and not to repeat the same problem over again and again.'

After outlining the supply-side, infrastructure and market access problems that Lao PDR faces, he concluded that what was needed to help LDCs benefit from trade included seriously addressing the supply-side constraints and productive capacity of LDCs.

Disadvantaged position

Martin Khor, Executive Director of the South Centre, noted that many LDCs have higher ratios of exports to gross national product than some developed countries. 'It is the way in which the LDCs are integrated in trade that has been a disadvantage. LDCs are too dependent on raw materials export, and prices of commodities have had a long-term trend decline, thus causing major revenue and income losses for LDCs.'

He pointed out the role of speculation in the great volatility in commodity prices, since between 2003 and 2010, the investments in commodity index trading rose from $13 billion to $320 billion. Khor then highlighted the serious effects on LDC economies of the volatility of commodity prices and concluded that their fate should not be dependent on speculation.

He proposed, 'Commodity markets should therefore be regulated to reduce speculative forces. The old objective of stabilising commodity prices and ensuring decent levels should be pursued again. And ideally, there should be agreements among suppliers and consumer countries. Otherwise, suppliers of commodities should share their experiences and attempt to align supply with demand.'

A man carrying sacks of rice at a market in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Haiti now imports over 80% of its rice supply from the US as a result of imposed trade liberalisation policies.

Like the other speakers, Khor said that LDCs face the basic problem of supply capacity which hinders them from taking advantage of any market opening and that their exports outside of commodities therefore remain small.

He emphasised that it is thus vital that LDCs be assisted to increase their capacity to produce in agriculture, industry and services. They must be allowed and assisted to grow their own food and expand manufacturing, including through processing and manufacturing based on natural resources.

Damaging liberalisation

On trade issues, Khor stated that imports are an important aspect of trade and that the liberalisation of imports before a country is ready can damage local producers.

'This is the lesson from the many years of structural adjustment programmes that LDCs went through, when many LDCs were asked to lower their applied tariffs far below their WTO bound rates. Many farmers and producers saw their livelihoods damaged. Old structural adjustment programmes have to be adjusted, including by LDCs,' he stressed.

With respect to the Doha Round negotiations at the WTO, Khor said, 'In the WTO, it is recognised that LDCs have weak economies and thus need not reduce their bound tariffs in the Doha negotiations. However, if LDCs are part of customs unions [a type of regional trade arrangement] that also contain non-LDCs, then if the non-LDC developing countries have to cut their tariffs, the LDCs will also be affected.'

He gave examples of Southern African LDCs affected by tariff reduction obligations of South Africa, and Kenya in the East African Community.

Khor continued, 'Since it may take more time for the Doha negotiations to conclude despite the heroic efforts of our Director-General here [Pascal Lamy], the call by the LDC Group and the President of Zambia just now for an early harvest for LDCs or an early harvest for development generally should be supported, including at this conference. This is in line with the Doha mandate that developing countries' interests are at the centre of this Round.'

'Among the early harvest elements can be: duty-free quota-free market access for all products for LDCs; major reduction of cotton subsidies; simplification of rules of origin and phasing out of non-tariff barriers for developing countries' products; progress in services Mode 4 for LDCs; implementing TRIPS and public health amendment of TRIPS, and amendment of TRIPS to prevent biopiracy; reform of Article 24 of GATT to incorporate strong special and differential treatment for developing countries in the rules regarding bilateral trade agreements; and Aid For Trade resources focused on boosting supply capacity of LDCs. This list is very familiar to you. What is required is the political will for an early harvest in case the Round does not conclude soon,' Khor said.

He then turned to the free trade agreements (FTAs) that LDCs are negotiating, such as the EPAs between African and Pacific countries and the EU. He said that 'LDCs are used to FTAs that are non-reciprocal, such as the Everything But Arms initiative of the EU. In the EPAs, there is little special and differential treatment and the agreements proposed are largely reciprocal.'

Referring to the Zambian President's earlier statement that the requirements of developing countries have not yet been met, Khor said, 'The LDCs face a dilemma. They do not want a reciprocal deal in which they have to open their economies to the EU, but they also want to retain the integrity and operability of their regional trade agreements with their neighbours, such as EAC, COMESA, ECOWAS, SADC, etc. However, the European Commission demand in the EPA is zero tariffs for 80% of products. The proposals also include prohibition of export restrictions including export taxes, which poses difficulties for LDCs that want to process and manufacture their natural resources to climb up the value chain. They include TRIPS-plus elements, and WTO-plus obligations on investment and government procurement. All these would severely limit policy space of the LDCs.'

Khor concluded by proposing that 'the LDCs should not be placed in such a terrible dilemma. They should be allowed to continue to enjoy non-reciprocal trade preferences such as Everything But Arms. At the same time, they should also be allowed to maintain or enter into regional trade agreements with their neighbours that include non-LDC developing countries. One solution is for the EU and other developed countries to offer similar non-reciprocal arrangements with non-LDC African and Pacific countries. The US has given the African Growth and Opportunity Act to Africa, a similar gesture could be given by the EU re: EPAs.'

The WTO's Lamy summarised the afternoon's presentations as showing that to make trade work for LDC development, what is needed is proper market access and proper domestic capacity to trade.

He explained the state of play in three areas of market access: duty-free quota-free, where he noted that this has not yet been granted multilaterally to LDCs without conditions; rules of origin (which he noted were in many respects as important as tariffs), which had also not yet been transferred into multilateral, predictable, stable disciplines that LDCs would benefit from; and agricultural subsidy elimination or reduction where they distort the agricultural trade of LDCs – here, he noted that elimination of export subsidies is already on the table but that the US, EU and Japanese agricultural subsidy cuts which are on the table are linked to the overall completion of the Doha Round.

On capacity-building, Lamy claimed there had been a lot of progress in aid-for-trade funding. He concluded that what is needed now is political energy and determination at the international and domestic level.

He noted that if an operational conclusion was to come from the day's discussion, it would be to use the Istanbul conference to send a clear signal about what should be done in the future, as it did move a number of things forward 10 years ago.

However, some participants were surprised that he gave a rather low-key performance and did not mention (as he had been expected to do) that there should be political will to conclude the Doha Round.

Martin Tofinga of the Kiribati Chamber of Commerce and Industry highlighted the importance of seasonal employment programmes for people from Kiribati in New Zealand and said that the US and the EU should facilitate labour mobility.

He called for an import substitution strategy to be pursued after rigorous analysis of its foreign exchange implications. Due to the importance of domestic investors, he said the policy environment to encourage them should be strengthened. Tofinga also made an impassioned plea for action on climate change, saying that 'the tides are eating away our shores', their drinking water is getting saltier and 'we really do not wish to sink'.

Haitian experience

Camille Chalmers of the Haitian Platform for an Alternative Development made a fundamental criticism of the damage caused to Haiti by the liberalisation policies imposed through structural adjustment programmes. He explained that Haiti had produced 98% of its grains but was now a net food-importing country which imports more than 83% of its annual rice from the US.

According to Chalmers, many Haitian farmers could no longer make a living from farming due to the totally irrational decision to reduce tariffs which had made Haiti the most open economy in the continent.

He said this obviously had multiple consequences including great vulnerability in terms of food security, as could be seen dramatically in the riots of 2008, and the increased poverty and unemployment in the countryside led to a greater exodus to cities which reinforced the situation there.

He noted that the continued trend of liberalisation was making it impossible to undertake industrialisation and added that it was now necessary to break with the dogmas of the Washington Consensus and recognise the damage done to countries.

Chalmers emphasised the need for space for independent and sovereign policies, even if that means selective protection to support production. He also pointed out that it was an absolute priority to strengthen the productive capacity of LDCs.

Chalmers concluded that there was a need to think about the WTO and FTAs because they continue to be dominated by liberalisation, sometimes by ultra-liberalisation.

In the discussion, the US recognised the supply-side constraint difficulties faced by LDCs and encouraged all to look at capacity-building.

Ambassador Ali Mchumo, Chief Executive and Managing Director of the Common Fund for Commodities, said that in the absence of a Doha Round conclusion, there should be an early harvest for LDCs.

Oxfam New Zealand's Executive Director Barry Coates then highlighted the difficulties faced by LDCs when acceding to the WTO. He stated that even industrialised countries do not have to do what LDCs are being asked to do in WTO accession. He said that the WTO purports to be based on rules, but in its accession negotiations, those rules tend to be different for those acceding.

He noted that early liberalisation is not good for development and LDCs were asked to agree to WTO-plus obligations including prohibiting export subsidies and making commitments in service sectors. It is time to review the WTO General Council decision of 2002 on LDC accession and to insist on measures that would actually provide some right for LDCs to appeal to an objective body if the treatment they are receiving is not commensurate with their LDC status.

Brazil emphasised the importance of LDCs in standard-setting and that the usual holding of Codex Alimentarius (food and veterinary standards-setting forum of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation and World Health Organisation) meetings in developed countries makes it impossible for developing countries and, above all, LDCs to participate in a sustained manner in these organisations.

The result of this is that standards are set mostly for the needs and perspective of developed countries (and some developing countries). One alternative proposed by the Brazilian delegate would be to concentrate Codex meetings where the respective organisations are based.

The Brazilian delegate concluded by saying that if the Doha Round cannot be concluded soon, it is not because anyone is intent on improving market access for the LDCs, but rather because some developed countries are intent on obtaining more market access for themselves.

A representative of the Third World Network (TWN) noted that there had not been sufficient progress in the Doha talks in areas of interest to LDCs such as the elimination of trade-distorting cotton subsidies, an effective safeguard mechanism against import surges, a ceiling on the Green Box agricultural subsidies, full labour mobility for workers from LDCs as the panellist from Kiribati highlighted, and changes to rules to ensure that LDCs do not have to liberalise as much in any FTA.

She gave three examples of the way in which trade rules can impact on the ability to do value-added processing and move up the value chain.

Firstly, all industrialised countries except Hong Kong had industrialised via infant-industry protection. If LDCs have to remove or lower their tariffs at the WTO (for example, because they are in a customs union with non-LDCs which have to cut their tariffs) or in FTAs/EPAs with developed countries, this would make it much harder to industrialise and diversify away from exporting commodities.

Secondly, the TWN representative pointed out that another way to achieve value-added processing was to use export taxes on raw materials to make the domestically produced value-added materials more competitive.

She gave the example of Indonesia, which only had 4% of the world market share of plywood in 1980 but which, after imposing export taxes and bans on raw logs, had achieved 80% of the world market share of plywood in less than 10 years. Similarly, some experts noted that export taxes had been the most important tool in Britain's industrial development. Despite this, the EU seeks to limit or ban the use of export taxes and other export restrictions in its EPAs and FTAs (including with LDCs) and open government procurement, including in LDCs, at the WTO and its FTAs and EPAs.

Another example of a way to ensure that LDCs obtain more of the value chain is via maritime cargo sharing arrangements where exports from LDCs are carried on LDC ships rather than those from a third country. This is another practice which the EU seeks to prohibit in its EPAs and FTAs, said the TWN representative.

Khor of the South Centre, in responding to interventions from the floor, said that Haiti's import liberalisation had been the wrong kind at the wrong speed, similar to that in other LDCs, and undertaken mainly via International Monetary Fund and World Bank programmes in the 1980s-1990s that led to damage to local producers.

He noted that although the influence of these institutions may have diminished somewhat due to multilateral debt relief programmes, the policies and their impact remain. He therefore concluded that a change in the Washington Consensus is needed.

Khor pointed out that former US President Bill Clinton had apologised to the people of Haiti for the wrong kind of policy, such as importing subsidised rice from the US, which caused Haiti to change from being self-sufficient in food to depending on imports of US food today.

Khor said, 'We see that LDCs still have very low applied tariffs, far below the level allowed at the WTO, and that this is a major constraint on the ability to develop productive capacity.' He asked how a farmer can produce if she/he faces subsidised imports. He went on to explain the need to stabilise commodity prices at a decent level.

On the Doha Round, Khor said he supported what Brazil said and that the current impasse in the Doha negotiations is not because developing countries have not offered enough. He said they have made very major concessions that they have never made before in the history of the multilateral trading system.

According to Khor, the proposals on the table oblige some developing countries to cut their industrial tariffs by 50-70%, which is really too much. But some developed countries are requiring tariffs to be further cut to 0% in three major sectors, which would mean that prospects for development will be severely compromised. He concluded by saying that he hoped developed countries would look at the Doha Round from a development perspective, then this Round can have development principles intact, but not with the present proposals on the table.

LDCs' choice

As a conclusion, the co-chair of the panel discussion, Lilley, said that his Trade Out of Poverty group of parliamentarians has reached a consensus: it is up to LDCs themselves how far and how fast they should liberalise. He noted the strength of the infant-industry argument and that developed countries themselves have often used it, so 'it would be wrong for us to deprive developing countries of that opportunity if they choose.'

Lilley pointed out that if the developed countries block exports from LDCs, that is hugely important to LDCs, but because of the small LDC market, if developed-country exports are restricted in LDC markets, that is not terribly important to rich countries. Therefore, he concluded that rich countries can unconditionally open their markets to LDCs and should do so.

He said that, whether on the left or right of the political spectrum, they could reach agreement on this. He noted that agreement had been reached on this in the UK and increasingly in the EU and he hoped it would be in other developed countries.

Lilley therefore urged LDCs to knock on the doors of developed countries and ask them to remove their remaining barriers now. 'Don't wait for a Doha agreement or reciprocity. Countries can make their moves unconditionally, unilaterally and immediately and you just need to demand that they do so.' ◆

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South-South axis strengthens

While fresh support from the rich countries was largely lacking, the Istanbul meeting did see greater cooperation among the LDCs themselves and between them and the rest of the developing world.

Sanjay Suri

THE glass isn't exactly half-full, but it certainly is not entirely empty either. Within the broad failure of the week-long Fourth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC-IV) in Istanbul, many delegates are taking heart in a strengthening South-South front that has emerged.

That front failed to secure a trade agreement to the satisfaction of the LDCs. But delegates say the very act of joint and unified negotiations by the group has put them in a stronger position for bargaining in the years ahead.

There was no hiding the disappointment over the conference, though. 'We were looking for a bold, forward-looking and ambitious programme of action,' Arjun Karki, chair of the LDC-IV Civil Society Forum, told Inter Press Service (IPS). 'We thought member states would learn from the past three conference failures.'

The LDC Conference, organised through the UN, is held every 10 years. That gives countries a lot of time to prepare progressive policies for the LDCs – and then just a week to give expression to them. The developed world largely failed, despite progress at this conference on some counts.

'We had really been looking for a new aid architecture for the LDCs,' said Karki. 'The present structure is not really helping LDCs. That is based on the principle of market fundamentalism and neoliberal policies that have privatised profits and nationalised losses.'

But looking at the silver lining, Karki said, 'we are also encouraged by the political spirit of the LDC member states. They are working unified, very close together, and they tried to defend their interests until the very last minute. So there is some political achievement in terms of building and strengthening the LDC group as a political bloc.'

A Chinese foreman at a construction site in Guinea-Bissau. Developing countries like China, India and Brazil are strengthening economic and political relations with Africa.

The partnership between the LDCs and civil society has really improved, Karki said. 'So we can work together as a political group and as a pressure group in days to come so that our voices are heard by key development voices who make policies and programmes.'

There are deeper gains that others point to, even if these did not show by way of a deliverable new trade deal for the LDCs.

'South-South [cooperation] is really picking up speed because the latest UNCTAD [United Nations Conference on Trade and Development] report for the least developed countries for 2010 says the South is now the major market for LDC exports,' Demba Moussa Dembele, chairperson of LDC Watch, told IPS.

'Most foreign direct investment received by LDCs comes from the South,' he said. 'Not only in terms of financial resources but technology transfer. The emerging companies are becoming major players in the LDCs' economies. And loans given by emerging economies are mostly on a concessional basis, or grants.'

That new cooperation was strongly confirmed and strengthened at the Istanbul conference, Dembele said. 'We would like to push for greater South-South cooperation because in our opinion it's one way for LDCs to have more political autonomy to design their own policies and formulate their own priorities, and to implement policies that are in the best interests of their citizens.'

A clear sign of progress is what is not taking place, or at the least not being so confidently pushed, to corner the LDCs. Prime among these are the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) that the European Union (EU) has been seeking with many of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. The EU has succeeded in forcing Papua New Guinea and Fiji already to sign such deals.

There is widespread unanimity among the poor countries against such agreements that can be seriously damaging to LDC economies in the long run. The new South-South front is a bulwark against such agreements, says Dembele.

'The EU wanted to force these agreements on Africa in 2007,' Dembele said. The EU is easing pressure now 'because the EU is seeing the South-South connection becoming stronger and stronger, especially through China, India and Brazil. These three have very deep financial and political relations with Africa. And so the EU is afraid of losing its backyard, economically speaking.'

For the LDCs, this means an important new path, he says. 'For 500 years and more we have been mistreated by Europe. This South-South cooperation is fresh air for us. It is excellent for our liberation – if of course we use it wisely.' – *IPS* ◆

'Our voices have not been heard...'

Civil society activists have decried the failure of LDC-IV to fundamentally address the economic relations perpetuating the marginalisation of the LDCs. The following Istanbul Declaration of the Civil Society Forum held in conjunction with LDC-IV expresses their deep disappointment.

UN Photo/Evan Schneider

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon addressing the LDC-IV Civil Society Forum. The Forum voiced its dismay at the weak outcome of the Istanbul conference.

1. WE, representatives of civil society organisations, who have met here in Istanbul on 7-13 May 2011 at the Civil Society Forum of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the LDCs, have very much appreciated the opportunities throughout this process to express our views on the challenges to LDCs and the development of the Istanbul Programme of Action and the Istanbul Political Declaration.

2. However, it is with deep disappointment that, at the conclusion of this process, it is clear our voices have not been heard and reflected in the conference outcomes. The negotiations started with analyses of the failings of the Brussels Programme of Action, also reflected in UNCTAD's LDC report 2010. These showed that development partners failed to deliver their commitments to provide adequate aid, reform unjust trade rules, remove the burden of debt and build the capacity of LDCs.

3. More importantly, various analyses also pointed to flaws and shortcomings of the model of development promoted by dominant players in the international community. Export-led growth has been inequitable and unsustainable, resulting in LDC commodity dependency, de-industrialisation, environmental damage and socio-economic marginalisation. These failures and the flawed paradigm have contributed to the growth in LDCs from 24 to 48, and graduation of only three LDCs over the last three decades. More than half the women and men in LDCs still live in abject poverty. There is widespread violation of human rights. Social justice and peace have remained a dream.

4. From the beginning we stated clearly that this is unacceptable. The development paradigm must be changed. Our calls echoed proposals for a New International Support Architecture, and gone further in calling for a more fundamental transformation of the relations between rich and poor, powerful and powerless, men and women, the elites and those without resources, the dominant and the marginalised. We have urged for this conference to mark a turning point towards a more just, more equitable and more sustainable world. We are deeply disappointed that the Istanbul Programme of Action has failed to meet these challenges.

5. We strongly believe that it is important to base development on LDCs' strengths and not on their weaknesses. Countries may be categorised as 'poor' according to UN criteria, but they are rich in many important aspects – in community cohesion, in natural resources and being able to live in harmony with our natural world, in diverse cultures and in human dignity. And especially in the growing numbers of young women and men who have huge potential and hopes for a better future. In many ways, our societies are the most developed countries, not the least developed.

6. But the LDCs are economically disadvantaged, exploited and marginalised. As part of the preparation for this conference, civil society engaged in an extensive process of listening to the concerns of the people in the LDCs through local, national and regional consultations in Africa, Asia and the Pacific. These highlighted the greater burdens that the marginalised and vulnerable peoples of LDCs have had to face in the last decade, with new crises of food, water and energy, the impacts of the financial crisis, and the intensification of the climate crisis. There is deep fear over an uncertain future even as there is determination to survive.

7. The conference has failed to meet our expectations and the UN General Assembly [UNGA] mandate. The UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/63/227 calls on governments 'to mobilise additional interna-

tional support measures and action in favour of the least developed countries, and, in this regard, to formulate and adopt a renewed partnership between the least developed countries and their development partners'. This has not happened. Civil society is frustrated that, having caused massive costs in the LDCs through financial and food speculation, unjust trade rules, illegitimate loans with onerous conditionality, and ecological damage, including climate change, the developed countries have not even committed to provide more aid to LDCs. Even worse, many donors are either reducing their aid or diverting it to pay for climate change damage, despite their commitments in UNFCCC negotiations to provide new and additional funding for climate finance. Current levels of aid are dwarfed by the mounting costs of the damage done to LDC economies and their people.

8. We recognise the strong efforts of LDC governments and the Turkish government to develop tangible commitments in the Programme of Action, but the UNGA resolution's call for a renewed partnership has been undermined by the developed countries systematically having removed any targets, timetables and delivery mechanisms that may have been used to hold them to account. They have refused to accept commitments beyond those already agreed in other forums like the Millennium Summit, WTO and climate change negotiations. And they have used these negotiations to try to drive divisions between developing countries by calling for some developing countries to accept the same obligations as developed countries. South-South cooperation will be crucially important for the future of LDCs, but developing countries need to contribute according to their common aims but differentiated responsibilities. Support for LDCs from the South should complement but not substitute for the agreed obligations of developed countries.

9. We welcome the attention paid to enhancing productive capacity in the Programme of Action. This is crucial to create jobs for the growing numbers of young people through inclusive policies that capture more value from resources, diversify the economy and build on the strengths of LDCs. We also welcome the recognition that governments need to lead the development process, not donors or the private sector, and we welcome the establishment of a technology bank.

Education is crucial for citizens of LDCs to be able to participate fully in economic, social and political life.

10. But the approach adopted in the Programme of Action relies heavily on economic liberalisation repackaged in new ways. Market-led approaches have been replaced by private sector-led approaches. The Programme of Action calls for the removal of impediments to the private sector, without recognition that governments need to regulate to protect workers, consumers, the environment and local communities. Civil society accepts that the private sector can play a useful role, but our experience is of companies that have unsustainably exploited minerals, fish and forests; land grabs that have stolen the resources and livelihoods of local people; biofuel plantations that have destroyed forests and agricultural lands; food dumping that has destroyed farmers' livelihoods; and projects that leave local people with no water and a polluted environment. Intellectuals meeting here have reminded us that the LDCs must not remain the MECs – the most exploited countries.

11. In a number of areas, the Programme of Action calls for public finance to be given to the private sector in the forms of guarantees, investment promotion schemes and incentives. But these subsidies hand over public money to the private sector in the hope that the market will deliver public benefits. International experience with public-private partnerships demonstrates the need to avoid the public sector paying for the costs while the companies reap the profits. Funds needed to overcome poverty and injustice, including education, health care, water and sanitation, gender equity, social inclusion and community development are being diverted to subsidise companies. There is grossly insufficient funding now to meet the needs of the resource poor, without more being diverted from donors and governments to companies. Expropriation of the public purse is unacceptable.

12. We are calling for the Istanbul consensus to constitute a clear rejection of the Washington consensus. Government policy should be based on participative national development strategies that focus on each country's vision and core strengths. We must build jobs and opportunities for the sustainable use of our oil, our mineral wealth, our land, our forests, our fish and other natural resources, protecting the rights of traditional owners and users of the resources, adding value and insisting on fair prices. Diversification of our economies will require government leadership to build a strong domestic economy, with particular emphasis on creating

opportunities for cooperatives and social enterprises, small and medium companies and women-led organisations. The rights of vulnerable and marginalised people must be put at the centre of economic decision-making, with stronger mechanisms for transparency, integrity and accountability.

13. In particular, LDCs should pursue an environmentally sustainable and equitable growth strategy that is labour-intensive, that provides decent work opportunities to a wider range of people especially the large numbers of young women and men, coupled with opportunities to gain new skills and improve their livelihoods. LDC governments should uphold and guarantee core labour rights, including freedom of association, and prepare national plans for the implementation of the ILO [International Labour Organisation] Global Jobs Pact with the meaningful participation of social partners and representative civil society organisations.

14. Export-led growth was an important component of LDCs' development strategies in the Brussels Programme of Action, but LDCs still account for only around 1% of world exports. A decade ago, there were expectations that trade reform would be possible as part of a Doha Development Agenda. But 'development' has been erased from the agenda, and negotiations are stuck because of the unwillingness of developed countries to agree to reform the major trade distortions in the system, notably due to inequitable rules on agriculture. Civil society is calling for an end to unjust trade agreements and for LDCs to resist efforts by developed countries to negotiate reciprocal trade agreements. Special and Differential Treatment and policy flexibility for LDCs need to be made operational according to a given country's stage of development (rather than limiting it by time) within the WTO and regional and bilateral agreements, so that LDCs can adopt development strategies that reflect their specific needs and opportunities.

15. We call for the promotion of economically viable, socially acceptable and ecologically sustainable farming practices so that food sovereignty of LDC people is strengthened. Agricultural research that builds on seed diversity and socio-cultural farming practices needs to be supported and new and additional financial resources must be mobilised to support adaptation and strengthened resilience to climate change-related impacts. Agrarian reform policies must support the needs, strengths and rights of smallholder farmers, particularly women, and support them to organise into producer associations or cooperatives and to add value to their indigenous production systems.

A health clinic in Ethiopia. The need to strengthen health systems and infrastructure and to ensure functional health systems at all levels is critical to achieving the health-related targets of the Millennium Development Goals.

16. We urge governments of LDCs to promote and implement women's rights and gender equality, and to guarantee in their development strategies the enjoyment by women of their rights, as stated in domestic laws and international and regionally-agreed standards. Governments must ensure the effective participation of women in the formulation of policies and decisions, implementation, monitoring, follow-up and evaluation of strategies aimed at the realisation of the Istanbul Programme of Action.

17. All countries need to respect the human rights of migrants, migrant workers, their children and their other dependants. The right to 'movement with dignity' must be ensured. An effective regulatory mechanism must be set up to prevent sexual exploitation and forced labour, particularly for women and children who are highly vulnerable to these depravations. Countries must provide access to basic services and amenities and ensure effective social security systems for migrant workers. International efforts to combat ongoing incidences of human trafficking must be stepped up with provisions of severe penalties for people who engage in the trafficking of human beings.

18. Public investment in human development must not be sidelined in implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action. Education is crucial for citizens of LDCs to be able to participate fully in economic, social and political life. But formal education levels remain low in most LDCs. Although many LDCs are making progress towards the MDG [Millennium Development Goals] targets for primary education, this has not translated into opportunities for continuing education at the secondary and tertiary level. This is essential if young women and men are to have the skills to participate as citizens and as skilled contributors to LDC economies.

19. Similarly, the need to strengthen health systems and infrastructure and to ensure functional health systems at all levels is critical to achieving the health-related goals of the MDGs. Governments need to allocate sufficient resources to provide the infrastructure, salaries, human resources and training for edu-

cation, and increase public health expenditure.

20. We call for governments and donors to give a new priority to water and sanitation for all by 2020, and to the global Sanitation and Water for All partnership as a global platform to deliver national commitments on sanitation and water. The urban poor are particularly neglected. Service delivery plans must meet the growing needs for water and sanitation in cities and towns. The problem is not one of water scarcity but of political will. Government needs to develop mechanisms for social protection to be available to all citizens, greater accountability for the delivery of all essential services and the adoption of a rights-based approach. Civil society rejects the privatisation of essential services under the guise of public-private partnerships or otherwise.

21. We call for immediate and unconditional cancellation of all debts of LDCs and a moratorium on debt payments by LDC governments pending debt cancellation. An international process with counterpart national processes should be established, aimed at a rigorous study of illegitimate debt, including case studies, in order to come up with policies that lead to full and unconditional debt cancellation and changes in lending and borrowing policies and practices. Immediate changes must be pursued in the practices of lending and borrowing to move towards sovereign, democratic and responsible financing.

22. Industrialised countries must commit to deep, drastic, unconditional cuts in carbon and GHG [greenhouse gas] emissions through domestic measures, to be expressed in international, legally binding agreements within the Climate Convention that contain targets based on science and equity. The pursuit of false solutions must cease. They also need to commit to obligatory, predictable, condition-free, additional, non-debt-creating public finance to cover the full costs of adaptation in countries of the South, as well as the costs of shifting to sustainable systems – to be part of international legally binding agreements within the Climate Convention. Action is urgent to avoid catastrophic climate change. The Istanbul target to reduce the numbers of LDCs needs to occur because they graduate not because they burn or drown due [to] the impacts of climate change.

‘We call for immediate and unconditional cancellation of all debts of LDCs and a moratorium on debt payments by LDC governments pending debt cancellation.’

23. We call for more and better ODA [official development assistance] which must be directed towards development effectiveness rather than the dominant aid effectiveness approach. ODA must respect sovereignty and support people-owned policies and programmes, rather [than] being undermined by conditionality. Adequate and predictable sources of finance are needed, such as from a Financial Transactions Tax levied on the transactions of the major banks and financial institutions.

24. Civil society must be given a stronger role as a partner in development. Real ownership by LDCs of their development strategies requires not only ownership by governments but by society as a whole. States need to have the political space to decide on their own development, and strategies need to be discussed democratically, approved and monitored. In that regard, the primary accountability of governments should be to their own societies and parliaments, not to donors, investors or international agencies like the World Bank, IMF or WTO. Civil society should play a key role in supporting public participation and should be included as a core partner in all decision-making processes. And governments should create space for civil society to have an independent voice.

25. An effective follow-up strategy to the UN LDC-IV Conference needs to be created, implemented and monitored. We call for regular reviews of progress to renew commitments and generate political will. The mechanisms should not only rely on UN processes but include civil society, the private sector and other actors. There must be opportunities for objective assessments of progress, including the submission of reports by civil society, and mechanisms to hold governments, including both LDCs and development partners, to account for their role in fulfilling the aims of the Istanbul Declaration.

26. The participants in the Civil Society Forum have raised their voices and expressed their hopes for the future. They have expressed the need for immediate and effective follow-up to ensure results and delivery on the commitments made in the Istanbul Programme of Action. The remarkable amount of active participation on the part of civil society, and their commitment to continue working together for various issues long after the conference, demonstrates their interest and ability to influence change.

27. We will continue our work over the forthcoming decade. We will educate and raise awareness about the crucial challenges facing LDCs and the need for people-centred approaches to development. We will support and mobilise local communities and other citizens to challenge unjust and unsustainable policies and practices. We will play our part in ending the injustice of poverty and suffering. We will continue to work collaboratively with those who share our aims.

28. We conclude by expressing our thanks for the great contributions from our fellow participants here in Istanbul; the Civil Society Steering Committee; Cheick Sidi Diarra, the Secretary-General of this conference, and the staff of UNOHRLLS; Doctors Worldwide, host of the Civil Society Forum; LDC Watch, the Government of Turkey and the people of this lovely city of Istanbul; and the Chair and members of the LDC Global Coordination Bureau. ◆

The rural roots of poverty and hunger in LDCs

The Istanbul conference has come under criticism for not adequately tackling the underlying causes of poverty in the LDCs. For one such problem however – a decaying farming sector – the solution may already be at hand: sustainable agriculture.

Johannes Reichert

IF the Fourth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC-IV) 'does not look promising at all', as former UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the LDCs, Ambassador Anwarul K Chowdhury, pointed out bluntly ahead of the gathering, it is because the root causes of the problems of the world's poorest are not being tackled.

Instead of curing root causes of poverty and hunger that plague LDCs, the focus is on curing symptoms. Poverty and hunger are related to each other and to environmental degradation. This is underlined by the fact that the LDCs are primarily agricultural economies with nearly 70% of the population engaged in agriculture. But the productivity of LDC agriculture is relatively low. Land degradation is a major problem, due to increasing population pressure, erosion, water scarcity and the breakdown of traditional systems for soil fertility.

Nevertheless, farmers have little support from their governments. In fact, African countries, which constitute the lion's share of LDCs, spend only 3% of their budget on agriculture, disproportionate to the size of the sector in terms of employment and economic activity.

Encouraged by the rich developed countries who claim to be their redeemers meanwhile, most LDCs dismantled marketing boards, extension services and credit support and opened up agricultural markets to subsidised exports from developed countries some 20 years ago.

'This decimated agricultural sectors and most turned from net food exporters to net food importers within a decade – the LDCs' food import bill rose from $9 billion in 2002 to $24 billion in 2008,' informs a policy brief by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), titled 'Sustainable agriculture and food security in LDCs', released on 11 May.

'International finance organisations and bilateral donors advised several LDCs to set up production and export capacity for cash crops. While some countries, such as Tanzania, have been successful in this regard, this focus often distracted political attention and crowded out investment from staple food production and its supportive infrastructure and institutions,' notes the UNCTAD policy brief.

In addition, post-harvest losses in LDCs are large, with at least one-third of food produced being lost before reaching consumers due to spoilage, and poor storage and transport facilities. On-site processing of agricultural products is limited by energy poverty; 92% of rural households in sub-Saharan Africa have no electricity.

UNCTAD adds: 'Environmental degradation contributes to food insecurity. Natural ecosystems provide most of the world's poor with food, fuel, medicine, building materials and cultural identity. These systems are being systematically degraded and destroyed, and their regenerative and strategic productive capacity jeopardised. Unsustainable land management practices lead to scarcity of water for both drinking and agriculture. The changing climate increases extreme weather events in LDCs (extreme temperature, floods and droughts) and unpredictable changes in weather patterns that affect agriculture. Extreme weather events in LDCs increased five-fold from the period 1970-79 to 2000-10, resulting in over $14 billion losses. Land use changes, forestry and agriculture account for over 70% of LDC greenhouse gas emissions.

'Environmental degradation, low agricultural productivity, high post-harvest losses, limited connections to markets, energy poverty, limited education and non-agricultural opportunities, hunger and thirst lead millions of desperate people to leave rural areas each year for the cities, only to find that life is often no better.'

To check this vicious circle, rural areas in LDCs must be revitalised, transforming them into vibrant places with a clear perspective for families and young people, UNCTAD advises, adding: 'For this we need a fundamental transformation, even a revolution, in agriculture. This revolution should not be based on expensive, imported external inputs.'

The policy brief notes that governments spend large amounts of their foreign currency reserves on agrochemicals (synthetic fertilisers, pesticides, herbicides, fungicides). LDCs import over 90% of the agrochemicals used in agriculture. Many of these chemicals are dangerous, with pesticides being a top cause of occupational mortality and morbidity, and they are difficult to provide to rural farmers at the right time.

UNCTAD considers it problematic that the global seed, agrochemical and biotechnology market is dominated by few companies, with the four biggest controlling 60% of global agrochemical, a third of seed and almost 40% of biotechnology supply.

The prices of oil and agrochemicals are increasing, due to the increasing price of fossil fuels, used in agrochemicals, and mineral phosphorous, used in synthetic fertiliser. The agricultural input index skyrocketed just before the first food price crisis of 2008. The ratio of food prices to input prices fell steadily over the 2004-2008 period.

'Farmers were not profiting from higher food prices because their input prices were increasing much faster. In the light of the above, going down the high-external-input-dependent, industrial agriculture route places LDCs in a situation of extreme vulnerability,' notes UNCTAD.

But there is another way – one that builds upon and gives value to LDCs' strengths: sustainable agriculture. It focuses on ecological and not chemical intensification of agricultural production.

Sustainable agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. It combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life.

Research by the UN and numerous other bodies demonstrates that sustainable agriculture improves food supply, nutrition and livelihoods in LDCs. For example, a UNEP (UN Environment Programme)-UNCTAD analysis of 114 cases in Africa revealed that a shift towards organic agriculture production increased yields by 116%. Moreover the positive impact endures as it is based on strengthening the five types of capital in farming communities – human, social, natural, financial and physical.

The policy brief says: 'Building strong soils and improving soil fertility is key to sustainable agricultural practices, and increases soil water retention and resilience to climatic shocks such as higher temperatures, droughts, floods and storms.'

'Moreover sustainable agriculture, with its focus on building agoecological systems, promotes the use and further development of indigenous varieties, well adapted to local conditions and agricultural practices, and the associated knowledge,' says UNCTAD.

UNCTAD regrets that these traditional varieties are disappearing from farmers' fields worldwide at very high rates, and with them goes the associated wealth of traditional knowledge and culture. – *IDN-InDepthNews* ◆

The African state must be back in the saddle

The LDCs, the majority of which are African, may find resonance in recent calls emanating from the continent for the state to play a central strategic part in economic development.

Cornelius Adedze

IN its 2011 Economic Report on Africa, titled *Governing Development in Africa: The Role of the State in Economic Transformation*, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has joined the ranks of those calling for a greater role for the state in Africa's development.

Launched during the 4th Joint Annual Meeting of the African Union (AU) Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance and ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 28-29 March, the report makes the case for the return of the developmental state in Africa and advocates state leadership in the transformation of Africa's economies. The report says that for Africa to overcome its 'inherent development challenges', it has to have 'a comprehensive development framework that steers social and economic policies to work in a complementary manner.'

Africa's earlier attempts to make the state the main promoter of development were cut short by the intervention of the international financial institutions under the guise of the Washington Consensus, which, through structural adjustment programmes, called for the withdrawal of state participation in development. The state, according to the Washington Consensus mantra, had no business being in business, and therefore privatisation of even social services became the cornerstone of the development agenda of African countries. Enter the global economic crisis and then even the developed countries with their stimulus packages became apostles of the developmental state!

Abdoulie Janneh, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ECA, in his opening remarks to the experts session of the Addis Ababa meeting, did not mince his words when he suggested the need for 'a renewed discussion of the nuances of the dynamics of the relationship between an effective, developmental state and other stakeholders, such as the private sector and civil society organisations. It also points to the need for clear visions of development paths and coherent, consistent and coordinated planning frameworks.'

Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in his address also agreed that 'the debate on a new development paradigm centred on the concept of a developmental state is welcome and long overdue' for Africa as it is obvious that the neoliberal paradigm foisted on Africa, which limited the role of the state in development, has failed. For him, 'the neoliberal paradigm has got Africa's development wrong both in terms of understanding the source of the underlying problem and the solution it prescribes', hence the failure so far by Africa to develop.

Economic transformation

The message was also not lost on the ministers at Addis Ababa, who in their draft ministerial statement acknowledged that since 'market mechanisms alone are not sufficient for rapid economic transformation', there is the need to 'rethink the role of the state in Africa's economic transformation'. Earlier 'alternative government-led' initiatives may also have failed but efforts at the 'characterisation of an effective developmental state in the African context and based on an understanding of country-specific political, economic, social, cultural and environmental realities' could help in this regard.

They concluded, just like ECA's Janneh, that: 'The governance and management of development in Africa would need to be informed by lessons on successful state intervention from other parts of the world as well as a clear understanding of its limitations given the pitfalls of the past.'

African countries in a return to the developmental state will not be doing anything new. Apart from the example of Western economies' stimulus package response to the global crisis, the developed countries have used the developmental state model to get to where they are now. From the UK and the US to France, Germany, Japan and the current giants like China, India, South Korea and Brazil, the developmental state was the main driver of their development.

Africa's economic prospects are said to be favourable, with an expected growth rate of 5% in 2011. This is dependent on agriculture and commodities but all these are cyclical, hence the need for the developmental state that will ensure a comprehensive development plan that involves transformation of the economy into an industrial, value-addition one.

A greater involvement of the state is needed in such matters as the taxation system, the provision of essential services like good transport systems and reliable energy supply, good education and health systems which accompany development. The state must also get into strategic industries that will pave the way for industrialisation as envisaged in the early post-independence era.

Taking the lead

Affirming these measures at one of the sessions of the joint AU/ECA experts meeting were Emmanuel Nnadozie and Rene Kouassi, respectively Director of Economic Development and NEPAD Division at ECA, and Director of Economic Affairs at the AU Commission, who explained that in the context of scarce investment resources that characterises most African economies, sustained economic growth would be impossible without the state taking the lead, or at least playing a major role.

They used the recent cases in Europe, where the state ran to the rescue of countries such as Greece, Ireland and Portugal, as illustrations to justify the desire to see the state get better involved in the running of African economies.

The meaning and role of a developmental state can be better appreciated by drawing lessons from the Asian countries which based their development strategies on infrastructural development, mobilising savings for investment in education, health, agricultural diversification, science, information technology and communication, research and development, among others.

The developmental state as suggested by the participants at the Addis Ababa meeting should be one that looks 'to restructure its bureaucratic incentives away from rent-seeking towards facilitative, pro-growth and pro-poor allocation of resources' and ensures a 'sustained diversification of the production and export base' of the economy.

To achieve these ends will mean, among others, the adoption of development strategies and industrial policies for structural transformation, the strengthening of development planning institutions, public finance governance and long-term development planning and strategy-setting.

The agenda of the developmental state is not about outright nationalisation of industries but state intervention in strategic industries that will transform their economies. What the developed countries did to arrive at where they are today and what their central governments are doing in the name of stimulus packages to reignite their economies is but an attempt to reinvent the developmental state. Africa has been more or less in a 'permanent crisis' for over three decades and is therefore entitled to return to the developmental state agenda if it is to resolve its developmental challenges. ◆

Cornelius Adedze is Editor of African Agenda, *from which this article is reproduced (Vol. 14, No. 1, 2011).* African Agenda *is published by Third World Network Africa, the Africa secretariat of TWN.*

Africa and the developmental state

Kwesi W Obeng

FIERCE contestations over the African state have weakened rather than strengthened states on the continent to perform their functions, according to Omano Edigheji from the Human Sciences Research Centre based in Pretoria, South Africa.

In his presentation on 'The Global Economic Crisis and the Revival of the State: Implications for the State in Africa', Edigheji's call for a 'democratic developmental state' and a developmentalist coalition to drive the state agenda sparked an animated debate during a 21-23 March seminar on the global financial crisis and Africa.

The African state has to be both developmental and democratic. The neoliberal agenda, he argued, had very little democracy. If anything, it was very supportive of autocracy. In effect, the dominant neoliberal regime supported authoritarianism.

Edigheji said developed countries' responses to the 2008 crisis affirmed that declarations of the death of the nation-state were premature and misguided. Nationalisation is back on the agenda with the state acquisition of auto companies and nationalisation of private banks in the United States and Europe.

The global financial crisis has shattered the tired argument that the market is self-regulatory. It also unveiled one of the shameless faces of the dominant economic regimes as it prescribes socialism for the private sector and capitalism for the poor and working class.

This solution to the crisis offers an important juncture for intervention, the need for the developmental state, Edigheji argued. He defined the developmental state as a state that acts purposefully and authoritatively for the social good. In effect, the developmental state is a state that possesses 'developmentalist ideology'.

He identified some of the key organisational and technical attributes of the developmental state as meritocratic recruitment to the public service, good rewards and central planning agencies. The state's relationship with non-state actors constitutes the second group of attributes of the developmental state. With more than half of all Singaporeans living in state housing, for example, it was wrong, he argued, to say that developmental states only promote industrialisation. Developmentalism is a central part of a developmental state.

The type of developmental state in the last century was blind to the environmental question. However, the 21st-century developmental state has to be sensitive to the climate and environmental question.

The developmental state must build transformative and competent institutions – place emphasis on planning; revive or establish marketing boards; forge a developmentalist coalition (Edigheji did not define the social force that will drive this coalition) and good development governance (not good governance).

The framework must also include industrial policy, greening developmental state and enhancement of human capabilities. Edigheji said building that developmentalist coalition and engendering the 'democratic developmental state' are some issues for further research.

The seminar was hosted by Third World Network Africa in Accra, Ghana.

– *African Agenda* ◆

No exit: Yemen's existential crisis

There is no sign of the crisis in Yemen abating as President 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih refuses to step down despite massive and continuing demonstrations calling for the end of his over-30-year rule, says *Sheila Carapico*.

A VENAL dictatorship three decades old, mutinous army officers, dissident tribal sheikhs, a parliamentary opposition coalition, youthful pro-democracy activists, gray-haired Socialists, gun-toting cowboys, veiled women protesters, northern carpetbaggers, Shi'i insurgents, tear gas canisters, leaked State Department cables, foreign-born jihadis – Yemen's demi-revolutionary spring has it all. The mass uprising in southern Arabia blends features of the peaceful popular revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia with elements of the state repression in Libya and Syria in a gaudy, fast-paced, multi-layered theatre of revolt verging on the absurd.

The crowds clamouring for change in Yemen are diverse, and at the core are the youth.

Whether the drama will end in glory or tragedy remains to be seen. But indications are not promising. Already, President 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih has stalled and contrived to avoid signing a late April deal brokered by Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) neighbours desperate to restore a semblance of stability in the most populous corner of the Arabian Peninsula. The GCC extracted a verbal promise from Salih to resign the presidency after a period of 30 days. But convincing him to make good on his pledge under conditions satisfactory to Yemeni elites, the pro-democracy movement and interested foreign parties is a gargantuan task, requiring more diplomatic legerdemain than has been brought to bear so far. On 30 April, instead of signing on to the proposed agreement, Salih sent tanks firing live ammunition to clear some 1,500 campers from a central square in the Mansoura district of the southern port city of Aden. 'Abd al-Latif al-Zayani, secretary-general of the six-nation GCC, who had flown to the Yemeni capital of Sanaa to meet with Salih, returned to Saudi Arabia red-faced and empty-handed.

Under the Bush and particularly the Obama administrations, the United States has been deeply implicated in Yemen, which emerged in the late 2000s as a haven and launching pad for the Arabian Peninsula branch of al-Qaeda. Especially since the Christmas 2009 'crotch bomber' attempted to detonate an explosive device hidden in his underwear on an airplane in Detroit, the US has spent up to $300 million upgrading counter-terrorism, military and internal security forces loyal to Salih. The Pentagon provided helicopters, armoured vehicles, ammunition, surveillance technology, Humvees, night-vision goggles and other military equipment, as well as training, to its Yemeni counterparts.

Classified cables released by WikiLeaks show that this assistance increased despite the Salih regime's widely recognised backsliding from democratisation and toward repression, as well as plentiful red flags in 2009 and 2010 that American-made weapons were being used against domestic enemies. Gulf and French officials were also frank with the US State Department in their assessments of the regime's shattered legitimacy.[1] Indeed, as early as 2005, the US ambassador in Sanaa wrote a cable envisioning scenarios including Salih's fall to the legal parliamentary opposition, plotters among his inner circle or mass popular protests.[2] No one could have predicted the confluence of all three. But Washington, forewarned, might better have hedged its bets. It has yet to do so.

Over $1 billion in additional US military assistance already in the pipeline has been frozen in light of the spring's events. Hesitant to distance itself from Salih and low on sympathy for the protesters, the US was upbeat about the prospects for the face-saving GCC agreement to be sealed by the end of April. The Embassy in Sanaa announced that it was 'distressed' and 'disturbed' by the 'violence, April 27, that killed [12] and injured hundreds of Yemeni citizens...on the eve of signing an historic agreement…that will achieve through peaceful, democratic and constitutional means a transition of authority leading to new presidential elections in July 2011.' Its press release urged 'Yemeni citizens' to show good faith by 'avoiding all provocative demonstrations, marches and speeches in the coming days', adding coyly: 'We also urge government security forces to refrain from using violence against demonstrators.'

President 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih has thus far resisted all diplomatic efforts to secure his resignation.

The central players

At centrestage in the Yemeni potboiler is President 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih, barricaded in a fortified palace compound in the capital behind Revolutionary Guards and US-armed Special Forces commanded by his son and one-time heir apparent Ahmad. Peeping over the parapets, Salih delivers nearly nonsensical speeches in his trademark not-quite-literate Arabic inveighing against Zionist instigators and fornicating demonstrators. The revolt against his rule is coordinated from 'an operations room in Tel Aviv', he ventured on 1 March. On 18 April he denigrated the popular movement as an un-Islamic 'mixing of sexes'. To these and other pronouncements the throngs jeer and hurl their shoes at the giant video screen in the plaza outside Sanaa University: In video footage of the scene, the footwear look like flies buzzing around the president's face.

Defiant if not oblivious, Salih announced in late April 50,000 new, unfunded civil service jobs and vowed to relinquish power only 'through the ballot box', calling, spuriously, for elections monitored by international observers. 'People who resign from their posts and join the revolutions are the symbols of corruption and they do not have agendas for reforming the economic, cultural, social and developmental situation in the country,' he told military cadets on 25 April. Next, presumably enraged by Al Jazeera coverage of the demonstrations, he accused Qatar, one of the GCC states sponsoring the exit deal, of 'inciting and financing chaos'.

The partners to the proposed exit deal are the leaders of the so-called Joint Meeting Parties or JMP, a motley coalition of Socialists, Sunni Islamists and other conservatives affiliated with the party known as Islah, and partisans of Nasserist, Baathist and liberal platforms, as well as Islamists from the Zaydi branch of Shi'ism practised in (northern) Yemen. This legal, parliamentary opposition coalition has been bargaining with the ruling General People's Congress over the rules of the suspended electoral process for several years. It includes prominent national figures like former South Yemeni Prime Minister Yasin Sa'id Nu'man, human rights activist and Sanaa University professor Muhammad 'Abd al-Malik al-Mutawakkil and Islah spokesperson 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Anisi, among others with a measure of 'street cred'.

Comprised of politicians from both of the two Yemeni polities that unified in 1990, this important group has extensive experience in Yemen's unique National Dialogue of Popular Forces and in electoral and parliamentary politics. With its rotating chairmanship keeping any one star out of the limelight, the JMP has played a pivotal yet ambiguous role in the 2011 political crisis, embracing the demonstrations after they were well underway, refusing Salih's belated February offer to form a coalition government and now conferring with the GCC and other international actors to find an exit from the impasse. The JMP leaders accepted the deal whereby Salih would step down in return for immunity from prosecution for his many crimes and the promise that they would gain substantial parliamentary representation.

The plotters

When Salih accuses his opponents of sedition, he is referring explicitly to defectors from his inner circle. Two were tagged by US Embassy officials who detected dissension within Salih's original 'triumvirate' at least as early as 2005 and again in 2009. This fact alone makes them worth noting.

One is Gen. 'Ali Muhsin, Salih's henchman since 1978, head of the First Armoured Division and the Northwest Military Command who prosecuted merciless campaigns that vanquished southern secessionists in 1994 and scourged Sa'ada province in the far north in order finally to defeat Zaydi Houthi rebels and their tribal allies in 2010. In both battles, the general called upon radical Sunni jihadis to join the fight against godless Socialists in the south and Zaydi partisans in Sa'ada. US Ambassador Thomas Krajeski described him in 2005 as a sinister arms smuggler whose name was spoken in hushed tones because he was feared and mistrusted by the Houthi rebels, southerners, leftists and others.[3]

Subsequent cables revealed the rumour that he was assigned the nearly impossible task of fighting the Houthis in order to ruin his military reputation and thus his political ambitions. There is strong evidence, as well, that during its intervention in the conflict in 2010 the Saudi Air Force was given targeting recommendations to strike coordinates that turned out to be 'Ali Muhsin's command headquarters.[4] The general's 19 March defection and deployment of tanks to protect the demonstrators from forces loyal to the president was thus no surprise. Subsequent skirmishes could be the harbinger of a civil war between factions of the military.

In blogs, interviews and Facebook postings, pro-democracy spokespersons made it clear that they were not fooled by cynical turncoats jockeying for power but hardly interested in liberal democracy. When 'Ali Muhsin's troops deployed to the square outside Sanaa University, the demonstrators initially cringed, thinking he was coming to destroy them.

The other power broker, who broke ranks after at least 50 peaceful protesters were murdered on 18 March, is Hamid al-Ahmar, the most politically ambitious of the 10 sons of the late 'Abdallah bin Husayn al-Ahmar, paramount chief of the Hashid tribal confederation, long-time speaker of Parliament and stalwart of the original triumvirate backing Salih's rule. Although not his Reaganesque father, as a member of Parliament, part of the Supreme Committee of the Islah party, a millionaire businessman and a prominent figure in the Hashid confederation, Hamid is able to draw large crowds in the family's hometown of 'Amran. Salih is himself a Hashid.

US embassy cables made available by WikiLeaks indicate that Hamid al-Ahmar has been manoeuvring against Salih since soon after his father's death in late 2007. One cable from 31 August 2009 quotes him calling Salih 'the devil' and his son Ahmad and nephews 'clowns'. According to the same State Department missive, he promised to organise anti-Salih demonstrations if and when he could persuade 'Ali Muhsin to go along and also enlist Saudi assistance. A second cable dated the same day put al-Ahmar among a small group of insiders blaming Salih for 'wrong-headed policies' contributing to 'Yemen's myriad problems' who may be 'truly concerned about the fate of Yemen, or, smelling blood in the water…positioning themselves for a post-Saleh era.' In April 2011, the US Embassy in Sanaa felt compelled to issue a terse denial of rumours of its support for Hamid al-Ahmar.

50,000 pairs of clasped hands

State-run Sanaa television runs continuous tape of people jumping up and down, yelling 'the people want 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih', and file footage of marches celebrating his leadership. Yet neither he nor the dissident counter-elites can contain the unprecedented, sustained, spontaneous grassroots uprising of the past three months.

The crowds clamouring for change (*taghyir*) are diverse, and dispersed among at least a dozen cities and towns. At the core are the youth, the demographic plurality between the ages of 15 and 30 who have never known another government leadership: university students, graduates, dropouts and wannabes grasping at straws of hope for a better future in the Arab world's poorest country. They have turned their daily marches and sit-ins into performance art with music, dancing, skits, caricatures, posters, chants and collective gestures of defiance like 50,000 pairs of clasped hands held high. Women, most prominently the eloquent and outspoken Tawakkul Karman, head of the NGO Women Journalists Without Chains, have raised their voices more and more, in solidarity with demands for change and lately in outrage at the president's sleazy innuendo directed at 'ladies' who march or speak in public. The freedom struggle has now gone viral and virtually nationwide.

A peaceful intifada has been in motion since the summer of 2007 in the south, the territory known as the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and ruled by the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) from 1967 to 1990. In 1990, the south unified with the north, already ruled by Salih, and then attempted secession four years later. During the short civil war, the president called in assorted tribal militias and 'Afghan Arabs' – salafis returned from the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan – to assist the regular army under the command of Gen. 'Ali Muhsin. A beer factory and civil service administration offices in Aden were torched and looted, while the erstwhile southern Socialist leadership fled by boat to Oman. Northern military officers and gangs of scalawags installed themselves as governors, administrators and landowners. Men deprived of their jobs and pensions and women stripped of the rights enjoyed under the old Socialist administration seethed under what they regarded as occupation. Oil revenues from wells on what had been southern soil flowed into the coffers of Salih and his cronies.

After more than a decade of economic collapse and political repression, the youth and some of the old YSP cadres launched what became known as al-Harak, a movement for change.[5] By late 2010, their protests had become commonplace, although Salih and the official media succeeded temporarily in presenting their grievances as secessionist gripes that would destroy Yemeni unity. On 26 April, they marked the anniversary of the start of the 1994 civil war in which the former South attempted to reestablish its independent sovereignty.

Whether or not they harbour genuinely separatist sentiments, residents of the former South Yemen have good reason to feel they have been punitively targeted and deprived of basic liberties and entitlements.

Yet, by the same token, many southern tribulations resonate in every province of the republic: the grotesque enrichment of regime cronies at the expense of the many; deteriorating standards of living; obscenely bad schools, hospitals and roads; the skyrocketing price of meat, staples and even clean water; the lack of jobs for college and high-school graduates. Ambassador Krajeski had already seen prospects for revolt in the 2005 riots prompted by the lifting of fuel subsidies. Then, dissatisfaction was particularly acute among the perennially restive tribes of the eastern provinces of al-Jawf and Ma'rib, where truckers and pump farmers consider cheap fuel their lifeblood.

Grandiose pageants of presidential power, half-truths in the official media, indignities at military checkpoints, arbitrary arrests and imprisonments – these and other daily insults feed popular alienation, despair and frustration, most notably among the youth. While a privileged few cool off in swimming pools in their luxury compounds, the water table has fallen, decimating the farm economy that remains the livelihood of the rural majority. Farmers and ranchers facing starvation have flocked to the cities where water supplies and social services are swamped. Misery has become the new normal; millions barely survive on the equivalent of a dollar or two per day.

Misery loves company

Without a doubt, Yemenis were inspired by the revolutionary movements in Tunisia and Egypt in early 2011. Gatherings in Sanaa and other cities in January, as the spirit of Tunisia diffused in the Arab world, were relatively restrained affairs, replete in some cases with folding chairs for various JMP dignitaries.[6] In February, as Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak began to proffer concessions under the sustained pressure of the street, the timbre of the Yemeni rallies rose in intensity. On the evening of 11 February, the date of Mubarak's resignation, thousands of joyful youth converged on Sanaa's Liberation Square. There, they were confronted by uniformed security forces and regime-supporting agitators armed with sticks.[7]

Thus prevented from occupying the central Tahrir Square, the youths nevertheless eventually found their own iconic protest locale: the plaza before the gates of Sanaa University, which they have redubbed Taghyir Square in homage both to their core demand and the rhyming name of the epicentre of revolt in Cairo. The first tents were set up there on 21 February. People who gathered in Taghyir Square echoed the slogans of Tahrir Square, which in turn had travelled to Egypt from Tunisia: '*Irhal!*' (Leave!) and '*al-sha'b yurid isqat al-nizam*' (the people want to overthrow the regime).

Salih's men borrowed the failed tactics of Mubarak, sending thugs wielding batons into the crowds and rounding up known regime opponents. On 18 March, in a pitch of fury or panic someone ordered snipers overlooking Taghyir Square to open fire on the assembled protesters. By the following day at least 50 were dead and more lay dying. In disbelief, fury and sorrow, a record 150,000 marched in Sanaa's biggest 'day of rage' so far. Ministers, ambassadors, civil servants, members of Parliament and military officers including 'Ali Muhsin declared their sympathies with the protesters. On 23 March a state of emergency was declared. Within a month, a tent city housing men and boys (and sometimes whole families) from around the country stretched, by some accounts, for miles along the streets leading to Sanaa University. Other camps were pitched in other cities and towns.

In provincial cities, where hundreds or thousands had attended rallies, tens of thousands now seized public spaces. In Ta'izz, a large commercial and industrial city in the verdant southern mountains of the former North Yemen, and the neighbouring city of Ibb, simmering discontent erupted. The Ta'izz-Ibb area, a rich agricultural zone of peasants and sharecroppers often called the 'middle regions', served as a bridge between the southern Harak and the revolutionary movement centred in Sanaa. People from Ta'izz travelled, telephoned and tweeted with family and compatriots in Aden, Hadramawt, Abyan and other parts of the former South Yemen already in ferment. Youth and parents in Hudayda, the Red Sea port that is the hub of the Tihama coastal plain where Afro-Yemenis suffer the country's highest rates of poverty and political disenfranchisement, filled the public square with banners and chants: '*Irhal!*' In mid-April protesters were shot dead by security forces in Ta'izz, Hudayda and other cities, as well as in Sanaa. Each funeral – at least 145 to date – provoked more angry or grief-stricken dissenters to call for the downfall of the regime.

Insurrectionary sentiments fuelled patriotic solidarities and unifying sympathies. These spread to the vast plains, mountains and deserts north, northwest, east and somewhat south of Sanaa, in the provinces of Sa'ada, al-Jawf, Ma'rib, 'Amran and Dhamar. In these rather sparsely populated, semi-arid regions analogous to Texas or Wyoming, the so-called tribal heartland where ranchers, cowboys, truckers and hillbillies carry Kalashnikovs or even bazooka launchers and historically harbour deep mistrust of the central government, conventional protests were mixed with 'traditional' acts of civil disobedience, such as road blockages and commercial stoppages. In a heavily tribal area further south, al-Bayda, men threw down their arms in April to march to another popular slogan: '*Silmiyya!*' (Peacefully!) Bear in mind: Armed tribesmen and villagers could resort to open rebellion but have elected to keep their powder dry.

The impasse

As April moved into May, scenarios were buzzing like the shoes tossed at Salih's visage on the giant screen. The accord that was supposed to be signed 1 May remained a work in progress up to the eleventh hour. The basic plan was for President Salih to transfer power to his vice president, the relatively impotent 'Abd al-Rabb Mansour al-Hadi, within 30 days. Under a new power-sharing arrangement, the ruling General People's Congress would retain 50% of the 301 seats in Parliament, the opposition JMP would acquire 40% and 10% would go to independents, including, presumably, representatives of the youth movement. Within a week a transitional unity government expected to be led by a JMP prime minister, preferably from the former South, was to be formed. Senior statesman 'Abd al-Karim al-'Iryani, the current secretary-general of the GPC, having until recently remained aloof from the fray, was dispatched to the Saudi Arabian capital of Riyadh to participate in negotiations with the GCC. Crucially, but vaguely, the proposal specified an end to the demonstrations. The remaining 70 loyalists in Parliament further demanded that Salih retain his leadership of the GPC. It was not clear if a popular opposition demand that he and family members resign their military posts was really part of the deal.

The arrangement was too ambiguous and riddled with loopholes for either Salih or the protesters to accept by the 1 May deadline. In the end, only the GCC monarchies and the JMP leaders were ready to sign. Salih first offered to have either al-'Iryani or Vice President al-Hadi verify the accord on his behalf in Riyadh, and then promised to sign in Sanaa in the presence of the GCC's al-Zayani. At the last minute, he acquiesced to sign in his capacity as head of the ruling party but not as president. This refusal scuttled the negotiation. Salih scoffed at a basket of carrots that left him with his arsenal of sticks.

Although Salih was the one who nixed the deal, it was clear that the GCC plan did not have popular backing, either. It had not been negotiated so much as cobbled together. On 24 April, a group signing itself as the Youth Popular Revolution Committee already rejected the provision of immunity from criminal prosecution for the president and his family, which could easily amount to carte blanche for excessive force during the month-long transition. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch shared these concerns. It was unclear, moreover, how the JMP could disperse the sit-ins and roadblocks; as commentator Jamila 'Ali Raja told Al Jazeera, the formal parties could invite their own members to abandon the barricades, but not give orders to the tens of thousands they do not represent.

Carrying away a wounded comrade on 18 March, when snipers opened fire on protesters in Sanaa. The deadly events would spark Sanaa's biggest 'day of rage' so far, with a record 150,000 marching in disbelief, fury and sorrow.

Political limbo

The failed GCC push to reach an accord by 1 May turned out to be the opening gambit in a complex negotiation that seems unlikely to be concluded soon. More and more, personalities from bygone dramas are now weighing in from exile: rebel leader Yahya al-Houthi and former South Yemen leaders Haydar Abu Bakr al-'Attas, 'Ali Salim al-Bayd and 'Ali Nasir Muhammad, to name a few, seek to claim the initiative. If there is to be forward momentum, their views and constituencies, such as they are, will have to be taken into account. And yet these additions to the mix can only complicate matters.

Yemen is now in political limbo and not far from the road to hell. No one believes that the president can continue in office or that he will relinquish power. The popular movement has come too far to back off and yet sees no clear path toward social justice. Gulf monarchies and the Obama administration appear to lack the diplomatic wherewithal, the strategic imagination or the humanitarian decency to envision a solution to the impasse. And yet daily the status quo becomes more untenable. Loyalist patrimonial forces are wont to shoot, and may yet provoke either a mutinous response or a full-fledged rebellion by armed citizens. The spirit of *silmiyya*, which served Tunisians and Egyptians so well, can persevere only so long in the face of live fire. In March and for part of April, it was possible to envision an orderly transition to a civilian coalition transitional government. The month of May may bring more bloodshed. ◆

Sheila Carapico is visiting chair of the Department of Political Science at the American University in Cairo. She will return to teach political science and international studies at the University of Richmond in the US. She is a contributing editor of Middle East Report*, from the website of which (www.merip.org) this article is reproduced.*

Endnotes

1 *Washington Post*, 9 April 2011.

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WORLD AFFAIRS

The Nakba protests: A taste of the future

Jonathan Cook explains why this year's marches by Palestinians to commemorate Nakba (the 'catastrophe' that befell them when they lost their homeland in 1948 with the creation of Israel) presage a crucial phase in their epic struggle for nationhood.

THEY are extraordinary scenes. Film shot on mobile phones captured the moment on 15 May when at least 1,000 Palestinian refugees marched across no-man's land to one of the most heavily protected borders in the world, the one separating Syria from the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

Waving Palestinian flags, the marchers braved a minefield, then tore down a series of fences, allowing more than 100 to run into Israeli-controlled territory. As they embraced Druze villagers on the other side, voices could be heard saying: 'This is what liberation looks like.'

Unlike in previous years, this Nakba Day was not simply a commemoration of the catastrophe that befell the Palestinians in 1948, when their homeland was forcibly reinvented as the Jewish state. It briefly reminded Palestinians that, despite their long-enforced dispersion, they still have the potential to forge a common struggle against Israel.

Protesters scaling the border fence between Syria and Israel on 15 May. The Nakba Day protests reminded Palestinians that, despite their long-enforced dispersion, they still have the potential to forge a common struggle against Israel.

Violent response

As Israel violently cracked down on the 15 May protests on many fronts – in the West Bank, Gaza, Jerusalem and on the borders with Syria and Lebanon – it looked less like a military superpower and more like the proverbial boy with his finger in the dam.

The Palestinian 'Arab Spring' is arriving and Israel has no diplomatic or political strategy to deal with it. Instead on 15 May, Israel used the only weapon in its current arsenal – brute force – against unarmed demonstrators.

Along the northern borders, at least 14 protesters were killed and dozens wounded, both at Majdal Shams in the Golan and near Maroun al-Ras in Lebanon.

In Gaza, a teenager was shot dead and more than 100 other demonstrators wounded as they massed at crossing points. At Qalandiya, the main checkpoint Israel created to bar West Bank Palestinians from reaching Jerusalem, at least 40 protesters were badly injured. There were clashes in major West Bank towns too.

And inside Israel, the country's Palestinian minority took their own Nakba march for the first time into the heart of Israel, waving Palestinian flags in Jaffa, the once-famous Palestinian city that has been transformed since 1948 into a minor suburb of Tel Aviv.

With characteristic obtuseness, Israel's leaders identified Iranian 'fingerprints' on the day's events – as though Palestinians lacked enough grievances of their own to initiate protests.

Inevitable

But, in truth, Israeli intelligence has warned for months that mass demonstrations of this kind were inevitable, stoked by the intransigence of Israel's right-wing government in the face of both Washington's renewed interest in creating a Palestinian state and the Arab Spring's mood of 'change is possible'.

Following in the footsteps of Egyptian and Tunisian demonstrators, ordinary Palestinians used the new social media to organise and coordinate their defiance – in their case, challenging the walls, fences and checkpoints Israel has erected everywhere to separate them. Twitter, not Tehran, was the guiding hand behind these demonstrations.

Although the protests are not yet a third intifada, they hint at what may be coming. Or, as one senior Israeli commander warned, they looked ominously like a 'warm-up' for September, when the newly unified Palestinian leadership is threatening to defy Israel and the United States and seek recognition at the United Nations of Palestinian statehood inside the 1967 borders.

Ehud Barak, the Israeli defence minister, alluded to similar concerns when he cautioned: 'We are just at the start of this matter and it could be that we'll face far more complex challenges.'

Israeli border police detain a Palestinian youth during Nakba Day protests on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Israel's violent crackdown on the protests reflected its lack of a diplomatic or political strategy to deal with the Palestinian 'Arab Spring'.

Lessons

There are several lessons, none of them comfortable, for Israel to draw from the Nakba Day clashes.

The first is that the Arab Spring cannot be dealt with simply by battening down the hatches. The upheavals facing Israel's Arab neighbours mean these regimes no longer have the legitimacy to decide their own Palestinian populations' fates according to narrow self-interest.

Just as the post-Mubarak government in Egypt is now easing rather than enforcing the blockade on Gaza, the Syrian regime's precarious position makes it far less able or willing to restrain, let alone shoot at, Palestinian demonstrators massing on Israel's borders.

The second is that Palestinians have absorbed the meaning of the recent reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah. In establishing a unity government, the two rival factions have belatedly realised that they cannot make headway against Israel as long as they are politically and geographically divided.

Ordinary Palestinians are drawing the same conclusion: in the face of tanks and fighter jets, Palestinian strength lies in a unified national liberation movement that refuses to be defined by Israel's policies of fragmentation.

The third lesson is that Israel has relied on relative quiet on its borders to enforce the occupations of the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza. The peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, in particular, have allowed the Israeli army to divert its energies into controlling the Palestinians under its rule.

But the question is whether Israel has the manpower to deal with coordinated and sustained Palestinian revolts on multiple fronts. Can it withstand such pressure without the resort to mass slaughter of unarmed Palestinian protesters?

The fourth is that the Palestinian refugees are not likely to remain quiet if their interests are sidelined by Israel or by a Palestinian bid for statehood at the United Nations in September that fails to address their concerns.

The protesters in Syria and Lebanon showed that they will not be pushed to the margins of the Palestinian Arab Spring. That message will not be lost on either Hamas or Fatah as they begin negotiations to develop a shared strategy over the next few months.

And the fifth lesson is that the scenes of Palestinian defiance on Israel's borders will fuel the imaginations of Palestinians everywhere to start thinking the impossible – just as the Tahrir Square protests galvanised Egyptians into believing they could remove their dictator.

Israel is at a diplomatic and strategic dead-end. On 15 May it may have got its first taste of the likely future. ◆

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas *(left)* of Fatah and Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal *(right)* sealed a deal in Cairo to form a unity government. Fatah and Hamas have belatedly realised that they cannot make headway against Israel as long as they are politically and geographically divided.

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Narco violence in Mexico: Eight theses and many questions

In the last three years, Mexico has descended into a spiral of uncontrollable and unimaginable violence as a result of President Felipe Calderon's decision to launch a war against drug cartels at the behest of the US. *Paco Ignacio Taibo II* seeks answers to the question as to how it all happened and how this nightmare can be ended.

MORE than three years ago, the man who directs the destinies of our nation from Los Pinos [the presidential residence] declared war against the Mexican drug cartels. Since then, we Mexicans have given – according to official statistics – more than 31,000 lives to the war, with countless injured. Several large cities (Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Monterrey, Tampico, Morelia, Culiacan, Mazatlan) live in fear and in virtual states of siege. Some regions have become abandoned, rural areas are a no man's land, federal highways impassable. Seventeen states of the Republic are living crises of epic insecurity. Thousands of complaints have been lodged to human rights commissions (and those are the ones that are made public, as fear [of reporting violations] prevents us from knowing more than the tip of the iceberg) for rape, kidnapping, blackmail, illegal raids, robberies and all kinds of abuse produced by the police forces, the Army and, to a lesser extent, the Navy. Urban neighbourhoods and industrial areas are no longer visited by tax assessors or health inspectors, because the drug cartels *are* the state.

How did we get here? How can this inertia be stopped before Mexico vanishes amid the fear and terror of a holocaust full of cut-off heads, and shootouts where innocent citizens are collateral damage? In Mexico, a place where police bust through doors during home raids and steal the cheese on the table, with jails where the mafia rules and there is systematic torture, where official statements of advances and successes are made that not even the children of the great urban bourgeoisie buy? Mexico, where factories and shops close down, and mothers are murdered for protesting the murders of their daughters?

First. Calderon negotiated the launching of this war with President Bush, not with the then newly-arrived Obama. And he agreed in terms of a package deal with absurd conditions. The drug war has never been, nor should it be, a Mexican war. It was, and is, an essentially American war generated by increased consumption of drugs on a global scale in the United States. Thus, the Mexican proposal should not have gone beyond an offer to support a war that should take place in the land of the gringos by fighting the distribution networks, financial structures, and through border control. In their territory, not ours. But it didn't happen that way. In three years there have been little more than a half-dozen major operations on [the US] side of the border, while we witnessed the unleashing of the bloodiest confrontations we Mexicans have experienced since the Cristero War [of 1926-29].

Images. I was able to uncover, through reading local newspapers in Acapulco, the reported previous occupations of most of the 15 men who were recently found beheaded. Two teenagers, a carwasher, a garbage truck driver, a mechanic, two jobless men, a local policeman, and three construction workers. They represent the infantry of the Acapulco Cartel massacred by the Chapo Guzman Group (according to notes found at the site) for control of the town square.

Second. It took the Calderon government a year to ask the US for control of weapons trafficking. Since that time the government hasn't received any response. According to official numbers, close to 50,000 weapons (careful with these official numbers: who counted them?), ammunition, rocket launchers and heavy machine guns have entered Mexico, giving the mafias firepower superior to that of the armed forces. Today any narco lord's flunkie can continue to buy ammunition for an AK-47 in a hardware store in Houston. Bullets that kill Mexicans are happily sold in the US.

Third. Before starting a war – and we don't need to read Sun Tzu or Friedrich Engels to know – the state should conduct solid intelligence work. Who are the traffickers? Where are they? What are their ties? What is their financial structure like? A thousand and one questions needed to be answered. Today, we know that when Calderon started the war against the narcos, all or much of the intelligence apparatus of the Mexican state was controlled by factions of the drug gangs themselves. By using anti-narcotic officials at the highest levels, they conducted operations against rival gangs, stirring a hornet's nest of revenge that seems to be without end. How many policemen were working for the enemy? Agency directors, organised crime units, SIEDO, AFI commanders, deputy attorneys-general... To date, the Mexican government still does not know or does not want to know. To date, state intelligence is infiltrated, distorted, and fragmented. It is (as can be determined from their own press statements) absolutely incoherent.

Fourth. The judicial system is corrupted. It has been that way for many many years. There are officials from the Attorney-General's office who have been discredited, corrupt judges, absolute ineptitude when there is no declared complicity with the crime. One can't go to war with such a structure. How many criminals have been let go in the past three years? How many have received insufficient sentences when compared to the magnitude of their crimes? Pepe Reveles said the other day in a roundtable that those who handed over the corpses to El Pozolero (and we are talking about more than 100 dead people) would be set free soon because the Attorney-General could only charge them with possession of weapons and drugs due to a badly carried out investigation. A cancerous chaos reigns, as has customarily reigned in the Mexican justice system, a paradise of accidents and coincidences. We live in a territory with a backlog of investigations, disorganised files, no scientific evidence, lack of a national fingerprint bank, nonexistent gathering of information from all the policing agencies in the country. How many times have we read in the news that a person under arrest had recently been in jail? Who let him out?

Fifth. In the Torreon prison, the director tortured the prisoners. In another prison, gangs were given permission to go out at night to execute rivals. There have been massive jailbreaks at 10 other prisons. There are complaints about the control and the privileges granted to the mafia in all prisons, including high-security installations. More than a dozen prison directors have been dismissed in recent months. Has the internal situation changed? Without prior purification of the prison system, you cannot go to war.

Images. The most frightening of anecdotes: In Torreon a man is stopped at a red light. When the light turns green, the car in front of him stops without reason. He wants to lay on the horn, but resists the urge. These are not times for honking. The road is backed up. The light cycles through and turns red again. The man decides to get out of his car and kindly ask the men in the stalled car if there is any way he could be of assistance. The driver of the stalled car shows him a gun and hands him 200 pesos. 'You seem like a good guy. I just lost a bet with this jerk' (pointing to his co-pilot, who, smiling, shows off an Uzi).

'If you had honked, I would have shot you. Today is your lucky day, pal.' The car takes off. The kind man just stands there in a cold sweat.

Packages of money

Sixth. Conan Doyle, in the voice of Sherlock Holmes, used to say that when the story was unclear, 'follow the money'; one must follow the money, the financial trail. Narco trafficking, like the smuggling of alcohol in the US during the Prohibition era, or car theft in Mexico, is a criminal business, it follows the rules of a semi-visible market, it has investments, is subject to production and distribution. A portion of the money, millions and millions of dollars, will commonly be moved in packets of green bills wrapped up in newspapers and in Samsonite suitcases. But the other portion, perhaps the most important, becomes investments, houses, luxury automobiles, office buildings, hotels, stores, restaurants…

During the time of Caro Quintero, a district of Ciudad Juarez, jokingly called Disneyland, was full of extravagant mansions: Cinderella's castle, California-style mansions, cheap materials reminiscent of One Thousand and One Nights, Buddhist pagodas. Everyone in the city knew that it was narco territory. Money is visible. What about the routes, routes that come down from the US – are they not too? The SAT [Tax Administration Service] is very worried about charging taxes to any gringo who is not careful. Is it not possible to detect the millions that come down from the other side of the border? The Mexican government has put in place thousands of banking obstacles to movement of funds by citizens, but has not opened a macro-investigation regarding the banking operations that are related to the large sums of money of the mafias. Have chequebooks, bank account information, fingerprints, tracks not been found in the hundreds of seizures, searches, and detentions? Why is this never talked about? Why has the Mexican government not asked the US financial operations to block the flow of money going to narco trafficking? You cannot go to war without a solid financial investigation and a bilateral agreement with the US to block the narco dollars.

Images. A Santander Bank manager had been telling his regional boss for two years that he was receiving money from an unknown source. He was told: 'Money is money.'

Seventh. An Army convoy in La Laguna heads toward a high-security prison: they are transporting an important prisoner. Unfamiliar with the area, they have a local police patrol heading up the front and another in back. When they reach a traffic light, the local patrol stops. He flashes his lights three times and then zooms away at 100 miles per hour. The officer at the back does the same in reverse. From the alleys, gunmen emerge and engage in a shootout against the military. The patrolmen have yet to reappear in public, nor have the local officials, who have vanished into the big information black hole that is Calderon's war.

Between Monterrey and Tampico a convoy of rental trucks returning from a job are diverted by police to a gap, a rural road. At the end of the road a group of Zetas (gang members) armed with machine guns are waiting. The drivers are tortured and robbed.

Today, we know from the statements of those under witness protection that for years police chiefs played escort to drug transport runs and protected narco bosses. But it is not only the chiefs; many other police officers have acted in collaboration with, abetted, informed, and protected the drug bosses. The state has supplied the foot soldiers. One in three drug-related arrests – you can read it every day in the newspapers – is a police officer or former police or military man. Years ago in Tijuana I asked a newspaper editor why a dozen policemen had been shot in a clash between rival gangs. He replied that it is cheaper to hire a cop than to train a hitman. How is it possible that the Mexican (and US) Army has trained an entire body of military elites that then passed en masse to form the essence of Los Zetas? If we Mexicans knew, if *we* knew that crime was committed by the police in thousands of cases, how could the Mexican state *not* know?

Is it possible to hide the fact when someone's salary goes from $1,500 a month to $25,000? How many hours of economic research could a policeman endure before it is discovered that he owns six houses in subdivisions throughout the state of Mexico? Isn't there anyone in Mexico who can interpret a polygraph test? Or does the Mexican government not dare to use it at the risk of demonstrating that the majority of its agents lie? The majority? Ten percent? Ninety percent? Does a polygraph machine even exist in any police agency anywhere in the country? Or was it sold off to buy soft drinks and snacks at the nearest gas station?

A victim of a suspected drug-related execution. According to official figures, more than 31,000 lives have been lost to the drug war in Mexico.

Everything is born of a police service whose morals are perverted. And this is old Mexican history, which reaches its highest level during the 'German' times. The hitch is impunity. Mexicans know that historically the police and the Army are not a force for maintaining order, but rather a quasi-legal criminal force. Knowing what the Calderon government should have known (we cannot assume that the stupidity has stretched to the bounds of absurdity)? How could one dare to launch a war against the drug bosses with human resources like these? It was not only a war that one could not win, but one could not begin it without first purging the police force. But how do we clean up the police force without at the same time transforming the repressive nature of the Mexican state? A retired general once told me that he had no doubt there were still hundreds of honest captains and majors in the Army, but they were not the decision makers. You cannot stage a war against narco trafficking with this quality of human resources. There is no possibility at all of changing the situation while the dominant moral in law enforcement is the one we see today.

Images. Any citizen with a cellphone can record them: On the road from Tampico to Matamoros, moving convoys of four or five black vans, with the spray-painted initials CG, the Gulf Cartel.

Companies that charge for protection

Eighth. Today the Narco is not only a dozen armed groups that control one of the most important economic activities of the country. They are companies that charge for protection, for example to all Cancun merchants. They control all street vendors in Monterrey. They represent justice in entire zones of Michoacan where La Familia represses abusive husbands and harmful debtors (read the notes of Arturo Cano in *La Jornada*). They are the controllers on federal roads that charge tolls. They are the ones that offer (and deliver) protection to a restaurateur in Ciudad Juarez if he pays, and no more health inspectors or Treasury requirements. They are the controllers of the largest human trafficking and kidnapping network on the planet. They are the ones who offer gainful employment to thousands of youths in border gangs. They are in large part our country, a new state. A state that replaces another state based on abuse and corruption.

In Chihuahua, a roadside mechanic pays the narco 200 pesos a week for the use of the sidewalk where previously he would pay a 300-peso bribe to the police. Two of a kind. Why should a capo be in prison if the one who committed electoral fraud and robbed the nation of their destiny is not, and neither is the one who with the modest salary of a government employee bought three castles in France? As long as the Mexican government cannot guarantee its citizens an honest relationship, you cannot fight a war on drugs.

Images. Some children in a picture on the front page of *La Jornada* show a sign that reads: 'Dear Kings, we do not want Calderon's war.' But it's not enough not to want it, we must stop it. So that means, before anything else, solving, among others, the eight problems that are presented here. ◆

Paco Ignacio Taibo II is a celebrated Mexican writer, historian and political analyst. This article originally appeared in La Jornada *(15 January 2011). The above, translated from the Spanish by Sandy Juarez and Jason Wallach, is reproduced from the Toward Freedom website (www.towardfreedom.com).*

Stateless refugee mothers fall through the cracks in Bangladesh

With no prospect of being allowed to return home or being granted asylum in Bangladesh, undocumented Burmese Rohingya mothers in refugee camps survive by taking refuge in the only thing they have left, each other.

Misha Hussain

A Rohingya woman at the Kutupalong refugee camp carrying her child.

MOTHERING in the Kutupalong makeshift refugee camp in the south-west of Bangladesh is about as tough as it gets. Those who live in the camp experience each day what it means to be undocumented and 'meaningless'. Without the right to work, to carry money, or to receive humanitarian aid, these ethnic Burmese Rohingya women and children bear the brunt of the international community's unwillingness to tackle a 20-year-old issue. Some mothers are as young as the age of 16. Many suffer, along with their children, from acute malnutrition, hunger and starvation. Many have little access to education or healthcare.

Undocumented Burmese Rohingya refugees are in a growing state of crisis in Bangladesh as authorities prevent international aid measures to help them. Relief agencies such as MSF – Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) and Physicians for Human Rights are now facing their lowest ebb in cooperation from Bangladesh government authorities as they attempt to bring medical and food aid into Kutupalong camp. Another aid organisation, Islamic Relief Worldwide, has recently pulled out due to the inability to receive required permits to assist those in need inside the camp.

As aid programmes and programme funding to help the Rohingya are now being discontinued by the Bangladesh government, Burmese refugee mothers are falling through the cracks.

'Bangladesh has increased restrictions on aid agencies working with the refugees,' says a recent Refugees International report. As Médecins Sans Frontières faces one wall after another with on-the-ground outreach inside Bangladesh, the continuation of the few medical programmes left for Rohingya women is under threat.

At the very bottom of Rohingya society are the women and girls who live unprotected lives as stateless unrecognised members of Bangladesh society. Deprived of many human rights including the right to work, as well as the rights of citizenship, in both Bangladesh and their original home on the other side of the border with Burma, they struggle to keep their lives intact. The original home for the ethnic Rohingya in Burma dates as far back as the 7th century AD.

While Rohingyas are not officially recognised in Bangladesh as refugees, legal recognition for them is vital to their survival and their ability to gain, and keep, asylum. Even the ethnic identity of the Rohingyas has been questioned in Burma, as well as neighbouring Bangladesh.

Life is far from easy. In the Kutupalong makeshift camp, Rohingya women are forced to accept lives that continue to harshly limit them. Today they live in degradation as they receive little to no access to employment, education, proper or safe shelter, maternal health services or protection from personal violence.

As Bangladesh closes the door on aid coming into the country, lack of options for the Rohingya women to receive maternal healthcare is now reaching crisis levels.

Marriage rights too have been an issue for many women and girls, but not in Bangladesh. In Burma permission for girls over the age of 18 to marry is not granted without payment of a prohibitively high fee; a fee that most Rohingya families could never pay. Because of this, some families have relocated to Bangladesh to enable their daughters to marry more easily.

But even with permission, marriages in situations of severe poverty often meet with roadblocks. Numerous women are left alone to care for their children as husbands leave the makeshift camp to find work elsewhere for weeks or months at a time.

'[Rohingyas] are the only ethnic group in Burma restricted from marriage, travelling beyond their village or building or maintaining religious structures,' says international advocacy and assistance organisation, Refugees International. 'In addition, they are subject to frequent forced labour, arbitrary taxation, sexual violence and land confiscations by the NaSaKa [Burma military forces].'

When husbands leave for work in neighbouring regions, women as heads of household are forced to get their family's food rations, as well as search for clean potable water along with wood for cooking and heating their homes. Dangers for women who often walk hours to gather basic necessities cause an ongoing, and serious, safety dilemma. Cases of rape are not uncommon.

Concerns at public community toilets in the camp are also a real safety issue as less than one toilet is available to women per 10 families at Kutupalong. When rape does happen, women have no access to making police reports or to medical help.

Protection for women and girls against domestic violence and sexual assault too is literally non-existent inside the camp.

After what many now claim was an attempt at ethnic cleansing in 1991-92, over 200,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh from Burma following reports of widespread torture, deaths and atrocities.

But the numbers of those who migrated are not reliable. The current population of Rohingya living inside Bangladesh may number over twice the reported figures. Under-reporting and lack of accurate statistics have contributed to a trend of deteriorating conditions for those in the makeshift camps.

According to the United Nations refugee agency UNHCR's 1997 statistics, 27,400 refugees were living in two makeshift camps: the Kutupalong and Nayapara camps on the Bangladesh-Burma border. Ten years following the UNHCR data release, the 2007 Bangladesh government figures showed a lower number of 26,000 for both camps.

Current Bangladesh government policies of ignoring stateless members, and their growing numbers, match persistent and growing problems inside the camps, where ignoring needs is part of a targeted effort to get minority migrants to permanently leave the region.

In Bangladesh, people give many reasons for excluding the Rohingya minority, including their ancient language, a language which has only been officially recognised since 2007 as 'one of the world's unique languages.' As Muslims, their brand of ethnic Sunni faith is also seen as a religious dividing line between themselves and others.

Because Burmese Rohingya refugees are considered to be undocumented 'illegal' immigrants, the women and girls are facing many of the same problems and situations of humiliation they faced in Burma. Exploitation is common. Women, and their families, who live in extreme poverty are in constant danger of being tricked by human traffickers in labour bondage or sex-trafficking schemes.

Disease and crisis conditions with diarrhoea and amoebic dysentery, often followed by severe dehydration, are found throughout the Kutupalong camp, with mothers trying to protect their children from camp-based water. Sewage management does not exist and the water teems with microbial pollutants from faeces.

With low access to even the most simple oral rehydration formula commonly used in Bangladesh, which includes water, salt and sugar, many Rohingya refugee mothers are forced to watch helplessly as their children's health deteriorates due to contaminated water.

Sanitation during childbirth is also an issue. Expectant mothers run unnecessary and high risks during childbirth due to lack of medical support offered in cases of complicated deliveries. While Bangladesh has recorded a remarkable 40% decrease in maternal mortality over the past nine years, many minority migrant women living in the makeshift camps have not been taken into account in the figures.

With neither prospect of asylum in Bangladesh nor hope of returning to their native Arakan State in Burma, these Rohingya mothers and children survive within the camp by taking refuge in the only thing they have left, each other. – *Women News Network* ◆

Humanitarian news reporter Misha Hussain currently covers South Asia for the United Nations news wire IRIN. Misha's writing/filming credits include: the BBC, the Guardian, Time, Scotland on Sunday, *the* New Statesman *and, in South Asia,* Prothom Alo *(Bangladesh) and* Dawn *(Pakistan).*

Additional material and research for this story has been supplied by Women News Network – WNN.

The Burmese refugees in Bangladesh

- Some 250,000 Burmese refugees live in Bangladesh, of whom just 28,000 come under the protection of UNHCR. The others live hidden in villages or within large communities in makeshift camps. The Kutupalong makeshift camp has 20,000 refugees.
- An estimated 44% of households are headed by women.
- The global acute malnutrition rate in the Kutupalong makeshift camp is 30%, double the emergency threshold and 10% higher than in Somalia.
- A $33 million United Nations joint initiative to regenerate the area where the refugees live was rejected by the Bangladesh government in April. – *WNN*

Women's issues missing from election manifestos

Writing on the eve of South Africa's 18 May local elections, *Zukiswa Zimela* pointed out the glaring absence of women's issues from the manifestos of the contending parties.

COME rain or shine, single mother of five, Sylvia Mathebula,* can be found selling fruit and cigarettes at the roadside because it is the only way her family can survive. 'Since the government is not helping us with jobs, rather than work as a maid for a white person I decided to start this little business by myself,' she says, lamenting the lack of opportunities for unskilled women.

South Africans will take to the polls on 18 May to vote in the country's fourth local government elections but women's issues are glaringly absent from many of the party manifestos, observers say.

This is despite the fact that 45% of female-headed households live below the poverty line, according to Statistics South Africa.

Janine Hicks from the Commission on Gender Equality says that none of the five major parties have mainstreamed the issue of gender. 'We have looked at a sample of party manifestos and we did a scan and analysis and in the main parties have not mainstreamed gender in their manifestos. Their main focus seems to be on service delivery,' she says.

Hicks says service delivery means something different for women and men as women have different needs compared to men. Municipalities need to recognise this and plan accordingly for service delivery. If there is no adequate sanitation in schools, girls tend to drop out of school because of the lack of private, functioning latrines and water when they menstruate, she adds.

During the last general elections in 2009 the Africa Media Monitor found that gender issues only featured in 1% of the rhetoric. This is despite the fact that women constitute more than half the country's population and more than half the registered voters.

This is also despite the fact that South Africa has achieved a 45% female representation in parliament. This places the country third in the international rankings on women in parliament, behind Rwanda and Sweden.

Lisa Vetten, from the Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, says that while there has been an increase in female representation in parliament, the situation on the ground has gotten worse for women. There has also been a decline in policies that would improve women's lives.

Vetten says this is because it is difficult for women to fight for women's issues if they are not on the party's agenda. 'What we need to remember is that women represent political parties, we don't vote for them as women. They are there to represent the line that their political parties take, which makes scrutinising party manifestos very important,' she says.

Vetten further adds that it is important not to think of women as one homogenous group but to identify their specific needs. She says that some women are more at risk than others. Lesbians in South African townships are vulnerable targets for corrective rape and homophobia. Corrective rape is when men rape homosexual women in the belief that they can change their sexual preference.

The country has been rated by Interpol as having the worst incidence of rape among Interpol states.

'Already we have had two murders [of lesbians] in KwaThema in Springs. We need to ask what local government is doing. Clearly there is a problem in that area,' she says. Eudy Simelane, a lesbian, was raped and murdered in 2008. In April 2011 Noxolo Nogwaza, a victim of corrective rape, was gang-raped and murdered.

Vetten says that sex workers are also a vulnerable and marginalised group. 'Loitering and some municipal by-laws are used to unlawfully arrest women who engage in sex work. We see police abusing women when they arrest them. Women are reluctant to go and report when they have been raped as sex workers,' she says.

'I think there is also reluctance sometimes, people feel like women have enough equality and they don't need more,' Vetten says.

Hicks points out that although men and women deserve equal access to energy and services, their positions in their family and in society mean that they need them for different things.

Often the onus is on women to provide fuel for the family. This is something that municipalities need to consider when prioritising who should be able to access electricity, and even the cost of electricity for poor communities, Hicks adds.

'So you look at women gathering coal and dung and other unclean forms of energy using productive hours that they could use for running a small business in gathering energy,' says Hicks.

'There is a general assumption that because we have gender equality in the constitution, gender equality has been achieved,' says Vetten.

Vetten called for civil society to be louder in voicing the needs of women and making sure that women's needs do not fall off the agenda.

Meanwhile, Mathebula will not be voting on 18 May. She has given up hope and lost faith in government. 'This voting that we do does not work. All they want is for us to vote while they get all the money,' she says. – *IPS* ◆

* Not her real name.

VIEWPOINT

Marriage of novelty with nostalgia

The British royal wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton was a festival of exclusion which denied the reality that exists behind the image of impeccable décor.

Jeremy Seabrook

EXACTLY 30 years after the disastrous fairytale wedding of Charles and Diana, it was the turn of their son to rewrite the recent matrimonial history of the House of Windsor. This was accomplished by doing everything imaginable to erase the ghosts of 1981. It was as different from that alliance as could be imagined: a love-match, an anomaly in perpetuating royal dynasties. The couple knew each other intimately, and had spent much time together since they met at St Andrew's University almost a decade earlier. Kate Middleton is a 'commoner', although her family figure among the top few percent in Britain in terms of both income and education. Even the dress – object of such effusions – eschewed the grandiosely corseted confection that had constricted Diana in 1981; indeed, the wedding-gown itself was a symbol of the made-over monarchy. The bride is a very different personality from the unstable and unhappy Princess of Wales. The rules of the game – marry for dynastic purposes but make love separately – were suspended between the couple, whose 'normality' and 'ordinariness' have been stressed.

The blushing newlyweds Prince William and Kate Middleton – is absorbing one 'commoner' into the traditional ruling castes as much social mobility as we are going to get in this generation?

Apart from that, it seems that everything else was in duly regal order. The glittering processions, the colour, the choreographed ceremonial, the high fashion, the apotheosis of the fusion between royalty and celebrity, the eager crowds camping out for days on the hard stone pavements, the idiosyncratic dress and patriotic fervour of people waving the union flag and singing ancient imperial ditties, 'Rule Britannia' and 'Land of Hope and Glory', to keep themselves warm in the chill April night. A floodlit Buckingham Palace, trees transplanted into Westminster Abbey in readiness for a record TV audience across the world, showed Britain at its polished best, with commentators gushing over the Scottish state coach, the restored Edwardian landau, the 1950 Bentley and Rolls so shiny the trees of the Mall were reflected in its scoured veneer. A flawless performance of a country in which, it appears, there is neither dissent nor poverty. A day of national rejoicing, in which we are supposed to identify ourselves, renew our vows to an altered monarchy and relearn once more who we are.

'Big society'?

But there are at least three elements that deserve closer scrutiny. First of all, efforts to reinstitute erstwhile popular activities such as the street party, of which some five and a half thousand apparently took place up and down Britain, including one in Downing Street, with its invited celebrities behind the black iron railings, eating what looked like retro nourishment of jelly and cupcakes. This is of a piece with Prime Minister David Cameron's determination to create the 'big society': a reassertion of the power of community, which is to take over from a retreating state. No matter that this is in defiance of reality; since community has been fragmented and broken into pieces by the florid individualism of the past 50 years. It might also be noted that Cameron's dedication to the benign hypertrophy of Society stands in stark contrast to the efforts of his inspiration, Margaret Thatcher, who famously announced that there was 'no such thing as society'.

These were the nuptials of nostalgia with modernity. A fly-past by Lancaster bombers from World War Two also reminded us of the togetherness of Britain during the Blitz – an unfailing reaffirmation of our finest moment: that an event from almost three-quarters of a century ago has to be constantly replayed says a great deal about the destiny of Britain in the intervening years. The event also celebrated a militaristic present: not only were the uniforms of the officer class ubiquitous, but jets also screamed over the Palace as a reminder of the work of Britain, recent or current, in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, as an ancillary agent in the bringing of order to outposts of the new imperium of global capital.

The second noteworthy quality of the day was the distinct triumphalism of the traditional ruling castes. Absorbing one commoner is as much social mobility as we are going to get in this generation. To remind us that this was simply a daring experiment, everything else spoke of continuity, irreproachable propriety, the reactionary reflex of a royalty whose foreign representatives constituted a sadly depleted phalanx in the Abbey. Much was made of the omission from the guest-list of the two most recent Prime Ministers of Britain, Labour's Blair and Brown. The sparkling assembly seemed to declare with a single voice that the levelling doctrines of socialism had finally received their quietus. Labour, it appears, ingested by the Establishment, has been chewed up and spat out again, notwithstanding the wan presence of Ed Miliband. It was almost as though Labour had never existed: Kate Middleton is a symbol of the only form of progress now on offer – the personal ascent of the individual high-achiever.

The coverage of the royal wedding projected 'a Britain of fantasy, in which the impoverished and the disaffected, the downtrodden and the despairing, the unemployed youth, the student protester... have no place'. Picture shows students marching against the British government's education spending cuts.

That Tony Blair was absent also shows the remarkably selective memory of the Windsors. After all, a mere 14 years ago, after the death of Diana, he had been instrumental in reconciling a dangerously disaffected public to the aloof and unforgiving monarchy. He did much to save them from themselves, and appeared to have softened the stony heart of power, when the Queen returned to London to be close to her subjects in an unprecedented outpouring of public grief.

Tony Blair's even greater service to the preservation of the social edifice of Britain, of which the monarchy is the peak, went equally uncelebrated. For it was his purpose to demonstrate that Labour poses no threat to the existing order. Instead of gratitude for this priceless gift, the royals behaved with the same punitive hauteur with which they reduce to invisibility everyone of whom they do not approve. The historic mission of labour has been accomplished, and it can sink back into the forgotten turbulence of the industrial revolution whence it sprang; landscaped now, grassed over, planted with saplings and ornamental shrubs; the 'satanic mills' to which the congregation referred as they sang 'Jerusalem' have been safely sanitised or exported to the slums of Asia and Africa.

The third aspect of these celebrations was the virtually monochrome nature of the people, not only in the Abbey but also on the streets. BBC cameras sought out, with some anxiety, and in a traditional reversion to cliché, the happy smile of non-white faces on the Mall and elsewhere; a mock Hindu wedding was held in Southall, where members of the Middleton family once lived. Ritual obeisance was made to the 'commonwealth family', but if the spectacle was for global diffusion, the political message was strictly for home consumption.

Amid the spectacle and majesty, it seemed that a redundant imperial pomp had been forced back upon itself, too extravagant to be contained within the narrow confines of these islands; clearly the ceremonial had been designed for wider horizons than those of Britain; and the projected 2-billion-strong TV audience served as surrogate for the once-captive millions of empire. The 8,000 journalists, 'the eyes of the world on London', reassured us that we are unrivalled in presentation, if not in power, the burnished image and the precision engineering of Victorian pantomime.

The TV channels, uncritical, fawning, sycophantic, gave the impression that this all captures the essence of Britain. It is a Britain of fantasy, in which the impoverished and the disaffected, the downtrodden and the despairing, the unemployed youth, the student protester, the disemployed public service worker, the marginalised and the spurned seeker of refuge, have no place.

This royal wedding was not just a love story, as TV presenters declared it to be. Nor was it 'a private family occasion.' It was difficult not to feel sympathy for the nervous gaucherie of the groom, the fate of whose mother cannot have been far from his thoughts, and the poised charm of his bride. This ought to have transcended the mummery. But it was impossible to ignore that this was a festival of exclusion, a denial of all the other versions of Britain that exist behind the impeccable décor.

Perhaps the assertiveness of the restoration of government by millionaires and boys from Eton is a little premature. The 'austerity' they propose to the people has not yet really begun to take effect. The relegated and unruly, the uninvited and disregarded have barely realised what is going to hit them in the coming years. When they do, they may prove to be, not the meekly dispensable minority of this fictional world of inturned imperial supremacy, but a force to be reckoned with in a country which proclaims the imperishability of its traditions all the more vociferously as it is bypassed and overtaken by the urgencies of an impatient and restless 'real world', which it evokes constantly but from the asperities of which it believes itself exempt. ◆

Jeremy Seabrook is a freelance journalist based in the UK.

Media complicit in rise of xenophobia in Europe

As European leaders increasingly question the concept of a Europe without borders and follow each other in announcing the end of multiculturalism, the media response has been mostly to present migrants as destabilising Europe's labour markets and welfare states.

Zoltán Dujisin


UN Photo/OCHA/David Ohana

People escaping the conflict in Libya await food distribution in an Egyptian border town. Despite the fact that most of those who fled Libya have gone to Egypt and other neighbouring African countries, European media have raised fears of a migration crisis in Europe.

THE contribution of the media to the worsening image of migrants in Europe was debated in Budapest at a conference titled 'Promoting Migrant Integration through Media and Intercultural Dialogue'.

The conference, organised by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Hungarian Presidency of the European Union, ran from 16-18 May, and was aimed at helping media representatives provide fair and balanced coverage of migration issues.

With far-right, anti-immigration parties gaining strength throughout Europe, journalists have been signalled as frequent accomplices to rising xenophobia.

'European public opinion is being pressed with the threat of a migration wave. Both politicians and journalists should recognise their mistakes,' Czech sociologist Ivan Gabal told participants.

Mircea Toma, president of Active Watch, a Romanian media monitoring agency, advanced a similar view: 'Journalists often don't look at events with an eagle eye, but rather with the same perspective as anyone in the population,' he said.

The increasing commercialisation of the mainstream media and the profit imperatives it imposes seem to be at the core of the lowering of quality in media coverage of migration-related issues.

'We certainly need some transparency rules to see where the funding is coming from and what are the political groups involved,' Aidan White, former general secretary of the International Federation of Journalists, told participants.

'There is a crisis within the media, a financial crisis that is reducing the quality of training, of journalism, and ultimately journalists' capacity to tell complex stories.'

There is a harsh, competitive environment that is leading editors and journalists to violate codes of ethics. 'If anti-immigration writing allows the media to stay in business, the media will go for it,' Milica Pesic, executive director of the UK-based Media Diversity Institute, warned.

Still, blame should not be placed exclusively on the media, White said. 'This is not just a problem of the media. Issues related to economic migration are complex, but lack of courage is leading to an unscrupulous form of politics. We are facing a general problem of societal anxiety about our healthcare, our education and our labour market.'

An anxiety which, participants agreed, has peaked with the Middle East revolts in general, and the Libyan crisis in particular.

Since the beginning of what some have termed the 'Arab Spring', 'no more than 30,000 people have arrived in Europe, but the reaction has been surprising', Kinga Goncz, vice-chair of the European Parliament's LIBE (Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs) Committee, told the conference.

'This is not a large number but from reading the media you would think it's a huge number. There's a paranoid fear that these people will overburden Europe, while actually some of the economies that are better recovering from the crisis, like Germany's, require even more migrants,' she said.

The latest crisis has also underlined the ethnocentrism of European media. 'Eight hundred thousand people, overwhelmingly migrant workers, have fled from Libya and gone mostly to Tunisia, Egypt, Niger, Chad and Algeria. This indeed represents a migration crisis, but it is not affecting Europe yet,' Jean-Philippe Chauzy, head of the IOM's Media and Communication Unit, told Inter Press Service (IPS).

The message was, however, not that media should portray migrants positively; instead, speakers stressed the need to ensure balanced and accurate reporting.

'Journalists have prejudices of their own,' Pesic said. 'It's very important to know the facts, figures and sources, but even when they have them, some papers will go out of their way to mislead.'

Concerns over lack of journalistic ethics were shared by more than one state official: 'Journalists often have an agenda, in the ministries we often provide them with correct, written information and they still write it wrong or put things out of context,' Paulina Babis from the Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Policy told IPS.

Yet some questioned why journalists would even begin by approaching officials and not give voice to those who remain mostly voiceless: 'Migrants and their organisations should speak for migrants, not government officials,' White said.

'Journalists will go to the easiest available source, they don't have time for much else. What we need is an alternative sources handbook that should be made available to them,' he suggested.

Journalists, civic actors and international and state officials agreed the solution lies in increased cooperation between the media and other societal actors.

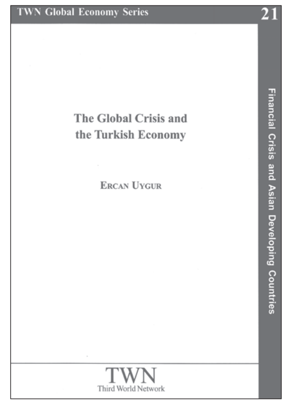
'Migration is a complex and changing issue and journalists have less and less time to develop expertise. They don't have the resources to cover an issue which requires a comprehensive understanding of the context,' Chauzy said, speaking to IPS.

'The present context is one of economic downturn and growing unemployment, which is leading to polarisation. That's why the media should get all the information it needs: biased coverage is less acceptable in an era when access to information is a lot easier than at any other time in history,' he said. – *IPS* ◆

The Global Crisis and the Turkish Economy

by Ercan Uygur

After a period of relatively high and stable growth, the Turkish economy suffered a serious blow from the global crisis of 2008-09. This paper examines the extent to which the major macroeconomic indicators of growth, employment and inflation in Turkey have been affected by the worldwide downturn. The paper also looks at the main channels through which the crisis reached Turkish shores: external trade, capital flows, the banking sector and business confidence.



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Assessing the Turkish authorities' response to the crisis, the paper contends that there was a delay in taking fiscal and monetary policy action to counteract the effects of the global turmoil. The effectiveness of the measures that were eventually implemented has also varied, with further concerns arising over the burden imposed by the fiscal measures on the government budget.

In terms of the future outlook, the paper states that post-crisis adjustments in the global economy may put paid to Turkey's prior reliance on foreign capital inflows to fuel growth. In any event, the crisis has amply exposed the dangers of dependence on volatile financial flows – a dependence which, in Turkey's case, has also been detrimental to long-run competitiveness and employment generation. Consequently, the author suggests, Turkey should move away from this unsustainable growth strategy and, among other measures, consider instituting capital and exchange controls in the medium term.

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Rabindranath Tagore (7 May 1861-7 August 1941) is well known as the great Indian poet who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. But he was more than a great poet as he left behind a rich legacy of writings and achievements as a novelist, playwright, music composer, painter, educationist and much else. On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of his birth, we pay tribute to this many-sided genius by reproducing the following poem from his famous collection, *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings).

Gitanjali 55

Rabindranath Tagore

Spring is awake at the door today.
Don't provoke or play your tricks
by hiding your veiled life away.
Open the heart's-flower on its stem,
forget, forget the 'us-and-them';
in the song-vociferous sky
let your fragrance wave-coast by;
make free with every ounce of sweetness,
in the wide world losing your way.

O what a deep hurt of the forest
sings in its tender greenery!
Waiting for whom on his way from the sky
does the Earth swarm into her finery?
Now as the south wind through my heart pours,
for whom has there been a knocking-at-doors?
Who wakes the fragrance-bewildered night,
as on the Earth his feet alight?
O beautiful lover and lord, to whom
is your solemn invitation, pray?

Translated from the Bengali by Joe Winter